

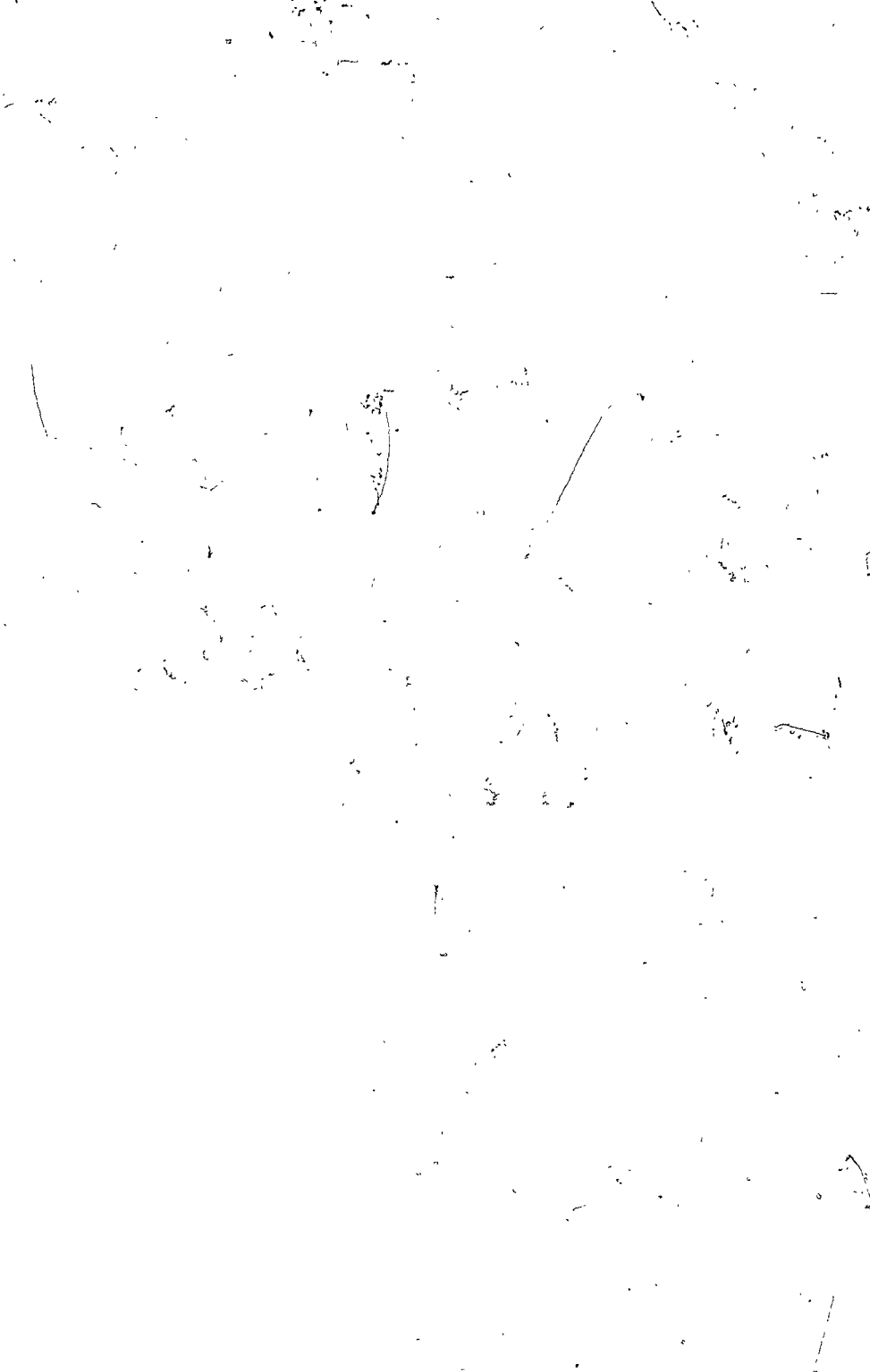
The
AUTOBIOGRAPHY
of a
NOBODY



LIBRARY OF PARLIAMENT



The
AUTOBIOGRAPHY
of a
NOBODY



The
AUTOBIOGRAPHY
of a
NOBODY

by
N. B. JAMES



J. M. DENT & SONS (CANADA) LIMITED
Toronto **Vancouver**

Copyright, Canada, 1947

BY

J. M. DENT & SONS (CANADA), LIMITED

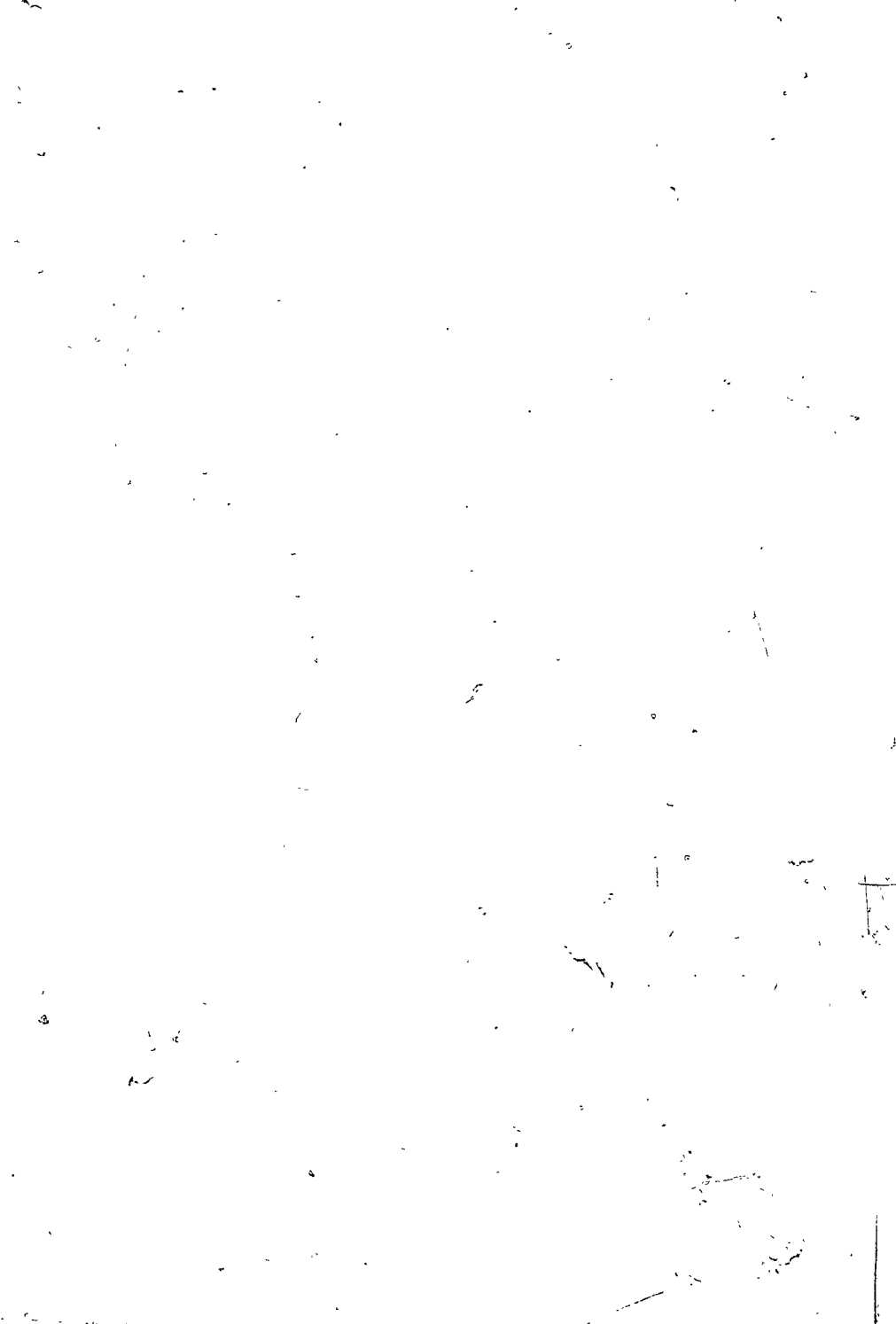
First printing, November, 1947

PRINTED AND BOUND IN CANADA

T. H. Best Printing Co., Limited, Toronto

DEDICATION

This book is dedicated with humble respect to the countless unrecognized millions of nobodies all over the world, whose tireless efforts, both conscious and unconscious, have so far succeeded in staving off the calamities which the conceit and stupidity of the Somebodies would otherwise have brought upon us.



FOREWORD

This book was not written by deliberate design. It just "kind of" happened. It has no deep earnest purpose and contains no moral—or immoralities. Maybe "Life is real, Life is earnest", but the author likes to ignore that aspect of it. He has meandered through life at a leisurely pace, and has taken time to enjoy the scenery. The purpose of the book—if there is a purpose—is to take others with him down the trail, and divert their minds from the tragedies of life and get them to see some of its beauties and frivolities.

While it is supposed to be an autobiography, the author does not claim any more truthfulness in it than you would find in any other autobiography, and he seems to think that this gives him plenty of license.

It started in as the account of the life of a nobody, and ends the same way. The fact that he eventually became a Member of the Alberta Legislative Assembly is merely incidental and of no importance, he still likes to think of himself as a Nobody amidst countless other Nobodies. Maybe he has, unconsciously and without malice aforethought, brought out a few lessons of life, but if so, it was done unconsciously and unintentionally—he hopes. The main purpose of the book is to make people chuckle, and

the success of the book will be gauged by the number of chuckles it generates.

We seem to have lost the divine art of chuckling lately, and in losing this, we have lost one of God's greatest gifts.

If the author has succeeded, even in a small way, in reviving this lost art, he will feel that his effort has not been wasted.

Edmonton.

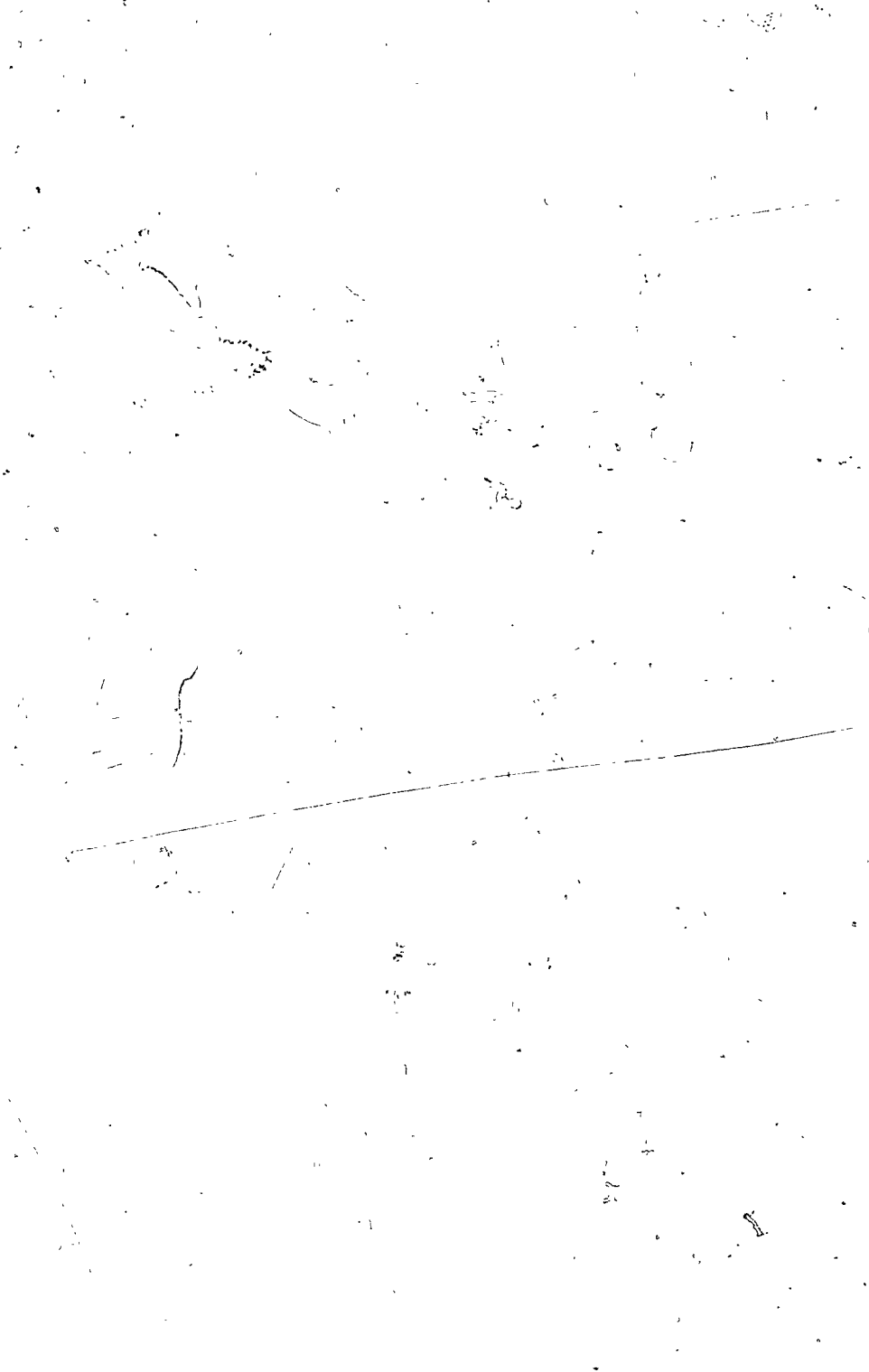
N. B. JAMES

CONTENTS

SPASM	I	THE ANCESTORS	- - - - -	1
	II	THE HORRIBLE EXAMPLE	- - - - -	9
	III	THE COLONIES	- - - - -	15
	IV	"GO WEST YOUNG MAN" AND QUICKLY	- - - - -	23
	V	BORN A WESTERNER	- - - - -	33
	VI	COWBOYS ARE HUMAN	- - - - -	41
	VII	LIFE IN THE RAW	- - - - -	51
	VIII	COWS, HORSES, PIGS AND HUMANS	- - - - -	57
	IX	THE LIQUID ELECTION	- - - - -	67
	X	UP IN THE FOOTHILLS	- - - - -	75
	XI	LEARNING ABOUT PEOPLE	- - - - -	83
	XII	A WEDDING AND INCREASED IRRESPONSIBILITIES	- - - - -	93
	XIII	MY FIRST SPEECH—THE OCCASION	- - - - -	101
	XIV	MY FIRST SPEECH—THE SPEECH	- - - - -	111
	XV	MY FIRST SPEECH—THE CON- SEQUENCES	- - - - -	117
	XVI	FARMING ON A ROCK PILE	- - - - -	125
	XVII	BEGINNING WITH FUNERALS	- - - - -	135
	XVIII	THE MAN-MADE DEPRESSION	- - - - -	145
	XIX	WHO WANTS FULL EMPLOYMENT? —I DON'T!	- - - - -	155

SPASM	XX	SOMETHING MUST BE DONE - - -	163
	XXI	PICKING THE CANDIDATE - - -	171
	XXII	THE FIRST SOCIAL CREDIT CAMPAIGN	181
	XXIII	THE HORRORS OF VICTORY - - -	191
	XXIV	DEBATE ON THE ADDRESS - - -	201
	XXV	THE RED TAPE PEOPLE - - -	213
	XXVI	ADVANTAGES OF A BACK-BENCHER -	225
		EPILOGUE - - - - -	237

The
AUTOBIOGRAPHY
of a
NOBODY



Spasm One

ANCESTORS

It seems that in the making of autobiographies there is no end (with apologies to Ecclesiastes), but the only notable thing about most of them is that there doesn't seem to be any particular reason why any of them should have been written.

Generally speaking, the people who write autobiographies are, or fondly believe they are, people of fame or notoriety. They have either done something or said something or written something that induces them to think that their public wants to know more of the intimate details of their lives, and so they write with the purpose of making sure that posterity, when it counts its blessings, will not miscount by reason of any false modesty on their part.

All these autobiographies having been written by people of note (of some kind), I think it would be a refreshing change if someone who had never either done, said or written anything remarkable would write an autobiography that would be just a plain unvarnished tale about nothings.

I cannot think of anybody more suited to this task than myself, so, with the well known spirit of self-sacrifice for which I am famous, I am undertaking the task.

Some misinformed person once said: "Lives of great men oft remind us, we can make our lives sublime." As a

matter of fact they don't do anything of the kind. All they really do is to give us an inferiority complex, and as we have no particular ambition to attain sublimity the thought of sublimising our lives leaves us cold. This autobiography will, I hope, have the opposite effect. The reader will, (if he completes the book), be able to heave a sigh of relief, and say to him or herself, "Well, thank goodness, I'm no dumber than he is anyway."

This feeling should be good for the sale of a good many copies.

It is customary, I believe, in writing an autobiography, to start with one's ancestors, most of whom were supposed to be "poor but honest." These two qualities seem always to be considered a virtue for some unexplained reason.

For the poverty of my progenitors I can vouch, but their honesty is open to question. In fact, most of them being dead, I can say "without fear of successful contradiction" that, though they may have been honest according to their light, their light was very dim.

Most people's ancestors came over with William the Conqueror, though knowing something of the size of the ships of those days, I don't see how they ever crowded in. (Incidentally, while we are on this subject I wonder just how big the Mayflower was.)

My ancestors were no exception to this rule. They, or at least one of them did come over with the notorious William. In fact, if my ancestor hadn't come I don't see how William could have come without him.

The reason for William's coming has never been explained. Some malicious Saxons suggested (very privately) that he had a rather unsavoury record in his own country, and that the authorities were only too glad to get rid of him.

However, the fact that *he* invaded England is not of paramount importance. He was probably just trying to blast his way into foreign markets, and was probably the forerunner of many others who have followed in his footsteps. (See the learned treatise on "The Origin of Wars", by Professor Maudlin). What really was important was, that, distrusting the somewhat primitive methods of cooking in such an uncivilised country as England, and being afraid of high blood pressure or something, he brought his own cook,

In those days they had not reached the high state of civilization that we have, and knew practically nothing of vitamins, callories or appendicitis. When they got sick they just got sick, and then they just got well again—or didn't.

The main point is that William, like others of later times, was afraid of anything new, so brought his own cook with him, possibly with the idea of poisoning any stray Anglo-Saxon that he missed in the ordinary course of warfare.

This is where I come into the picture. No, of course. I was not his cook. If I had been, the whole course of history might have been changed. People who have partaken of my cooking—and survived—never exhibited the same interest in public—or private—affairs after. Whether they considered that life had nothing more to offer them, or that they had endured the worst, and nothing in the future could hold any terror for them, has never been revealed—for which I suppose I should be grateful.

But—due to no fault of mine—and without my knowledge or consent, this would-be cook (they call them dieticians now) became my ancestor. He went by the name of Rowel, which was the rather ridiculous French way of spelling "spur". This name was given him because, after eat-

ing a meal of his cooking, everyone felt as if they had a couple of spurs running up and down their insides.

He didn't last long. William came into the kitchen one day when he was concocting a hash out of something or other—or to be more correct—something and other. William had missed his favourite hound and the smell of cooking—or perhaps it was the cook—had made him suspicious, and he asked abruptly "What's cooking?" to which my ancestor, who was dyspeptic, and consequently somewhat short tempered, replied, "Bologni."

William was so delighted with this witty retort that he decided then and there to confer knighthood upon my illustrious ancestor.

This was usually done by tapping the victim on the shoulder with the flat of a sword and telling him to "Arise Sir So-and-So."

Unfortunately, in this case William had just consumed a trifle more than his ration of Scotch (it was forty ounces in those days) besides a "Mickie" that he had pilfered from his stenographer's handbag, and, instead of tapping Sir Rowel on the shoulder with the flat, he hit him on the neck with the edge, which had such a disruptive effect on his anatomy, that he ceased to be, to all intents and purposes.

William, who seems to have been a particularly callous individual, went through his pockets, collected the small change, his permit and his accident insurance, and went out and hired another cook.

And that was the end of the first ancestor of which we have any authentic record.

After this trifling incident things went on in a humdrum way for some centuries. With the exception of a horse thief or two, a few bank directors, a newspaper proprietor,

an odd politician and a scattering of lawyers, my ancestors seem to have had all the earmarks of respectability. That is to say, they gave considerable negative evidence of being drab, dull and uninteresting, though I must say that some of them evidenced a kind of dumb dignity that kept them aloof from the common herd.

But along in the early part of the nineteenth century another ancestor came into a certain amount of notoriety. The family rather liked to put it, when they are forced to mention him, that he achieved fame).

This gentleman was what was known in those days, as a bruiser, and is now, in our more polite, if less truthful age, as a "gentleman of the ring."

As he is the one ancestor whom the family only mention in the secrecy of the family circle, and even then only, in hollow whispers, I will not give his name. Although he flourished exceedingly for a time, he came to rather a sticky end and died in his prime. In fact it was reported that he was rather more than prime.

It appears that he was billed to fight another bruiser named Porky Puglug, and the date was set for the fight. Soon after this my doughty, if somewhat grasping progenitor, was approached by certain Vested Interests, who had invested (for their shareholders, of course), large sums of money in Porky Puglug. My ancestor, who was a kind of super opportunist, and would in this day and age probably have a Seat in the House, or even a Portfolio in the Cabinet, yielded to temptation and accepted the magnificent sum of five pounds, seven shillings and sixpence on the condition that he lay down in the fight during a certain round.

Unfortunately Porky Puglug was approached by certain other Vested Interests (there were no interlocking direc-

torates in those days) and agreed to accept seven pounds, three shillings and twopence to do the same thing. The result was that in the middle of the fourth round they both lay down together and went to sleep.

Of course, there was a good deal of unpleasantness over the affair, and it was even brought up in the House by a nasty minded Radical Member, but the House being told by the Home Secretary that an investigation would not be in the best public interest, the matter was dropped.

It might all have ended there but for the fact that a very high government official happened to be present and was so impressed by my ancestor's ability to go to sleep on the job, and make money at it, that he immediately obtained for him an important post in the Civil Service, where he slept peacefully and usefully between paydays for some years.

Eventually the Chancellor of the Exchequer discovered his outstanding ability and ingenuity in padding, duplicating and even multiplying expense accounts, and had him transferred to the Treasury, and in time he rose to the position of a Vice-Chairman of the Bank of England.

It was while he was holding this position that his downfall came. One day, in a moment of fatal weakness and a spell of mental and moral aberation, he foolishly loaned a large sum of money to a man who actually needed it. This was, of course, in direct contravention to the policy of the Bank, who had obtained their tremendous power and success by only lending to those who didn't need it.

As a result of this fatal error of judgment his resignation was demanded. Although the loan was repaid on time—plus the interest—the Chancellor of the Exchequer explained that this had no bearing on the case. It was the principle

of the thing that mattered. He said that my ancestor had created a precedent that, if followed, would upset the financial system in such a way that it would shake the very foundations of the British Empire. He even quoted (or misquoted) Scripture to back up his statement.

My ancestor did not long survive this blow. The horrible thought that he might have to obtain a position in which he would actually have to do something was too much for him. He gradually sank back into the stupor to which he had been accustomed as a Civil Servant, and one day drifted into a sleep from which he forgot to wake up.

The real blow came to his family after his death. He had been largely responsible in introducing the excessive Succession Duties which the greedy governments of those barbaric days imposed on the estates of the Dear Departed, and on his departure for parts unknown—but guessed at—the Authorities (in conformity with subsection Q, Section 666, paragraph 95 of the Fleece the Corpse Act) meanly snaffled all the excess profits he had accumulated in his sleeping hours, and left the bereaved family without even the original five pounds, seven shillings and sixpence that he had filched from the Vested Interests.

And thus came to an ignominious end my most promising ancestor.

I feel sure there is a moral somewhere in this, but for the life of me I can't think what it is.

Had he not been cut off in his comparative youth there is no knowing to what heights he might have risen. He might have been a More-Than-Prime Minister, or the Chancellor of the Exchequer, and spent his declining years (Bankers spend so much time declining)

balancing budgets for a deficit and making speeches on inflation.

My family, shocked by the smeary reputation of this particular ancestor, seems to have shrunk from anything approaching notoriety from then on, and seemed to have concentrated with great success (until I appeared on the scene) on attaining respectability.

This is a full and free (very free) account of my ancestry. I hope my readers are duly impressed. I must confess on reading this over that I am rather staggered myself.

In the next spasm I will start the more or less real story of my life. This is going to be a rather difficult task. What with prefabricating incidents creditable to myself, and elimination of certain parts that might be misunderstood, I see I have got my work cut out, and my imagination strained to the limit.

Spasm Two

THE HORRIBLE EXAMPLE

Delving into the dubious history of my progenitors was done with a purpose. It is an attempted justification and apology for my existence. That does not sound logical, but I want to warn you that if you expect logic in this volume you are going to be woefully disappointed. My whole life has been delightfully illogical. That is why I have got a kick out of it.

A great many people who have resignedly accepted the apology as well as the fact of my existence as something they couldn't do anything about, though doubting the justification, are hoping (very faintly) that in this account of my life the justification may be forthcoming, and if not, having the satisfaction of saying, "I told you so."

I expect one of them at least will write a book for the young on the Awful Consequences of Chuckleheadedness, and I shall be the horrible example. If that happens, I shall feel I have not lived in vain.

I can only write this account of my life on the understanding that the reader will place no more credence in this story that he or she would in any other autobiography. The autobiography that tells the truth the whole truth, and nothing but the truth has never been written, so why should I be the first to start such a horrible fashion?

Autobiographies for publication, just like diaries for publication, are all made up of what the author wants "his public" to think about him rather than what he really is.

Even the publishers of today would never dare print an absolutely truthful autobiography. The dear innocent public would just love it, but they wouldn't be caught buying it:

Even my best friends acknowledge that there has never before been anybody just like me, and my worst enemies sincerely hope there never will be again.

Though my parents and the rest of the family were too kind hearted to openly express this wish, I think it was tacitly understood that a repetition of such a misfortune would be at least regrettable.

Now that we understand each other we'll get on. I was born (this at least is indisputable) in England. There is some doubt as to the exact day and hour. My mother, who happened to be there at the time, declares for the 4th of August, but the Registrar charged five shillings for certifying that it was the 11th of August.

However, as I neither said nor did anything remarkable for the first few days of my life, the date is not important. Whenever I can, I celebrate both so as to be impartial.

When I was born is not important. The people who died before that date are not here to express their regret, and those who are still alive (with some exceptions) are too polite to more than hint at it.

Why I was born has been a puzzle to many intelligent people. Some have been rude enough to hint that my parents were remiss in their duty to society when they refrained from disposing of me at birth. This, however, is just the emanations of dwarfed and shrivelled souls who

resent anything too lofty for their empty minds to contemplate.

Personally, I think that, had I failed to be born, the world would have sustained an irreparable loss.

However, I *was* born, and have existed with complete satisfaction to myself for a great number of years.

That I was born into a respectable family was not my fault, and I refuse to take the blame for it. An inexorable fate decreed it, and who was I to protest?

To me this arbitrary setting, in spite of the fact that I am really fond of my family, has always been a source of regret. Being a member of a family that prides itself on its respectability limits and restricts one so that one misses a lot of fun and joy in life.

Don't misunderstand me; I feel sure that respectability is necessary and make for stability and a rigid code of morals, but oh, how happy we could be without it!

Perhaps some day someone will write a book on "How to be happy though respectable" and I hope they will send me an autographed copy.

At present the perpetual effort to attain respectability seems to leave no time for the spiritual joys of frivolity and irresponsibility.

Had I been born into the family of a banker, highwayman or a stockbroker I might have gone far, and eventually ended up as the President of the Bank of International Settlements or a war criminal—or something. As it was I was handicapped at the start.

I am sorry to say that my parents, though they were always kind in a sort of sad and pitying way, never really

took to me, and though I tried hard to emulate them, and though my brothers and sister did their unpleasant best to inculcate in me respectable thoughts and manners, they never really succeeded.

That I was a model child has never been disputed. The only discussion was as to what kind of model. There was a good deal of diversity of opinion on this point, and I regret to say that all the models with whom they chose to link me up with were not very complimentary. The consensus of opinion was that I was definitely *unusual*. At first I was inclined to take this as a compliment, but it was finally impressed on me that "unusualness" was not tolerated in the circles in which my family revolved.

After a few years, years in which understanding between my family and me grew stronger (they understood that I was a hopeless case, and I understood that they understood), it was decided that I should be sent away to school. I could have gone to school, of course, right in our home town, but the family, for some strange reason was of the unanimous opinion that it would be better for all if I went away—some distance.

So, my Father found a boarding school for me in the north-west corner of England. (We lived in the south-east), and I left my family for my family's good.

I so found at school that the teachers didn't like me any more than my family had done, and not being restricted by the sentimentality of such things as family affection (or any other affection) were not so placidly resigned to my existence.

It is a painful fact that both the teachers and myself soon found that we were allergic to each other. We have

passed out of each other's lives since then (for which I know they are devoutly thankful), but my allergy to teachers has remained down through the years, and even now the sight of a teacher brings me out in a rash.

I have only known one teacher that did not have that effect, but she was young, irresponsible, and decidedly good-looking. I understand that later she lost her respectability and went on the stage.

In looking back on my past life I have come to the conclusion that one of the reasons for my lack of popularity with my family circle, and my earnest, if somewhat stodgy-minded teachers was that, though I have always been a serious minded individual, I was always serious in the wrong places, and broke out with what they considered gross frivolity just when they were at their stodgiest.

With the exception of the above generalities, I pass over the story of my school life. It was one of those painful experiences that society insists upon us going through, though I have never been able to find anyone who was wiser for it. This is, of course, not intended as a slur on education. I have such a reverence for education that I feel too unworthy to do more than worship it at a distance.

Possibly in my case either the method of teaching was of such a nature that it failed to draw out what was in the pupil, or possibly there just wasn't anything to draw out.

Meeting some of my classmates later in life I was amazed to find that, though they were diligent, conscientious and annoyingly priggish students at school, in the end they didn't know any more than I did, and what I didn't know would make an encyclopaedia in itself.

With the acknowledgement that I was not a brilliant

scholar, and at no time could be classed as teacher's favourite pupil, I will let the memory of it pass into the same oblivion that has absorbed the knowledge I obtained from it.

Spasm Three

THE COLONIES

After I had finished with school, or to be more correct, after school had finished with me (rather abruptly), my parents were in rather a quandary as to what to do with me. (Since then the problem has been too much for a lot of people).

They canvassed all the professions ("trade" was considered low) and reluctantly came to the conclusion that none of them were quite up to my standard. (They didn't put it quite that way.)

My Mother timidly suggested that, as I couldn't be a lawyer, professor, a Squire, or even a Bishop, perhaps they could compromise by making me a banker. She explained that, although banking had to do with trade, yet it was really a higher branch as it did not handle such common things as butter, meat, eggs or other articles of daily use (this was in the days when such commodities could be had), but only dealt in five pound notes, overdrawn accounts and interest.

My father, while explaining to her what he fondly thought were the real functions of banks, vetoed the idea. He said he had looked up my mathematical reports and found that the utterly disrespectful manner with which I treated figures, my lack of understanding of the principles of

lending to the rich and squeezing the poor, and my complete lack of reverence for the sacredness of money combined would be a fatal hindrance to my career, and that somehow he just couldn't see me as a Bank President.

Eventually after much thought and consultation with the rest of the family, it was decided to consult with the Member of Parliament who was fondly supposed by the uninformed to represent our particular part of the country, and with whom my father was on speaking terms. (It was just before an election.) This was done, and as a result the Member graciously deigned to visit our home. (I have told you it was just before an election.)

My parents cherished a forlorn hope that the Great Man, impressed by my vacuous expression of countenance, and perhaps for a consideration, such as my father's influence in the next campaign might obtain for me a life term in the Civil Service.

When the great day arrived an elaborate meal was prepared and I was sent out to the nearest grocers to buy some of his best port wine. I think it was two shillings and sixpence a bottle, and tasted just like that.

HE arrived. He dined and wined, and in spite of the latter, was genial and beaming all over.

When the proper time arrived (the port was running low) I was called into the presence and inspected. The Member, who had been so jovial and care-free up till then, changed perceptibly. A worried frown corrugated his noble—if somewhat foreshortened—brow.

"Is he not," he asked, "a rather unusual type?"

"Oh, yes," said my mother proudly. "He is VERY unusual. He is entirely different to our other offspring. In

fact he is different from any other young person we have ever met."

"I deeply regret to inform you Madam," said the Personage, "that unusualness and difference are the two things that, however excellent in certain walks of life, are never tolerated in the Civil Service. Our Civil Service must be moulded into a pattern. Unusual people have unusual ideas. A Civil Servant is not supposed to have ideas. Ideas are dangerous at any time, and in the Civil Service they are a positive menace to the country.

"It grieves me deeply to tell you that, much as I would like to recommend your son for a position in our great Civil Service, having the welfare of our glorious country at heart, my conscience would not allow me to jeopardise the Service, which is the backbone of our wonderful British Empire, by such a recommendation. I would advise you to find him a position in some other walk of life more suited to his *peculiar* abilities."

Shortly after, the Great man, pleading a previous engagement with the Home Office, left hurriedly. (By the way he was elected with a huge majority at the next election, mostly on his speech on the sacredness of the British Empire and all its institutions. Maybe I inspired him.).

He left a gloomy household behind him. Having tried every avenue of respectable employment possible, my parents, aided as usual by the rest of the family, decided that they had reached the end of their tether, and that I was a problem with which they could not cope, until one of them, evidencing an isolated spark of genius, suggested the "Colonies".

The faces of the whole party brightened immediately, and they almost shouted, "Yes, the Colonies!" I say they

almost shouted. My family would never so far forget themselves as to shout, but they did raise their voices slightly above what true decorum countenanced. In fact one of them actually squeaked.

The next question was which colony? My father, after carefully measuring with a ruler the distances of the various colonies from England, decided that New Zealand was the most suitable. Unfortunately for New Zealand, my mother objected. She had seen pictures of the aborigines there (I think really that she had been reading an African missionary book and had got a little mixed in her geography), and thought the way they dressed—or didn't dress—would be demoralising. Remember this was the nineteenth, NOT the twentieth century. Nowadays we wouldn't have much difficulty making a female aborigine blush.

After a lot of discussion (in which it was not considered necessary that I should take part), it was decided that I should go to Canada. My mother said that a friend of her's had once spent a week in a place called Toronto, and had found the inhabitants quite respectable—considering, and that by going there I might learn the art of respectability, and at the same time (she was a trusting soul), I might find my life work in the uplift of the natives.

The next step was to get all the information possible about this foreign country to which I was to be consigned. An urgent letter was sent to a certain steamship and railway company who took a special interest in the welfare—and fares—of young men desiring to emigrate.

A whole raft of literature very soon arrived, describing in glowing terms the glories of Canada, and was eagerly absorbed. The puzzle to me was that if what all these folders said about Canada was true, why the whole forty million

inhabitants of Great Britain had not moved there en masse long ago.

It was a land flowing with milk (unpasteurized, of course, in those days) and Money. As far as I could make out you just couldn't avoid being a millionaire if you had the perserverence to stay there a year or two, and didn't get into a poker game, or try to "corner" some market that didn't want to be cornered.

What appealed to me most was the fact that no mention was made of anybody having to work in this wonderful country. In one way or another the money just rolled in without any effort on one's part.

My father, who prided himself on being a man of the world, warned me, however, not to take this information too seriously. He said he thought that if I discounted it about fifty per cent I might come near the mark. Since then I have found that the dear man was still about forty-eight per cent short on caution.

The family was enthusiastic about the prospect, and I think if I had not been going most of the others would.

And so my ticket was bought, and I was given a certain amount of money for expenses—not too much, of course. The word "dissipation" was much in vogue those days, and the family took wise precautions to see that I could not dissipate myself too early in life. Later on, perhaps—but that is another story.

Meanwhile we had got in touch with three other young men from different families, whose parents also thought that their offspring would be better off in the "colonies," or at least that their families would be better off with them in the colonies.

And so on a certain date—in the very early nineties—

four bright young men left Liverpool and steamed down the Mersey for parts unknown—to them at least. There had been no difficulties raised by the authorities. In fact the co-operation evinced in getting us on board was rather overwhelming.

Even at that, due to the unreasonable behaviour of some of the Liverpudlian police, we nearly missed the boat. One of my companions, after paying some ill-advised visits to some rather unsavoury places where they dispensed a liquid which they had the temerity to call Scotch, suddenly decided that this was a great occasion, and that he should make a speech on the steps of the City Hall. The police, whose vigilance was only exceeded by their ill manners, decided that listening to the speeches of their mayor was about all they could be expected to stand, and escorted the lot of us to the police station.

On realizing that we were leaving the country, however, they hurried us off to the wharf and refused to leave us until we were placed safely in charge of a friendly steward.

On the boat we discussed among ourselves what part of Canada we should honour with our presence, and we also consulted some other passengers. One rather futile and important looking man with a bald head and a receding chin (I found out after that he was a Senator), after looking us over with a cold and fishy eye, told us that the further west we went the better. He did not specify for whom it would be better, but I had a sneaking impression that he was not thinking of our welfare. The same advice was given by citizens of Montreal and Toronto. The eastern provinces may be divided in some ways, but in this particular instance there was certainly a remarkable unanimity of opinion.

This being the case, and having heard that the West

was—well, the West, we decided that we would make Alberta our destination. No plebiscite was held in Alberta on the subject. The democratic rights of the people was not recognized as much in those days as they will be at some future date—we hope.

The fourth member of our party was a little different from the rest of us. He was really a *good* young man, and had somehow got into our group by accident. He was not only good, but earnest, and being both good and earnest, he was, naturally, conscientious—and just slightly painful.

He announced that the thought of Toronto appealed to him, and that he thought he would go there and get a position.

Although we were rather staggered at the thought of anybody actually *wanting* to live in Toronto, we heaved an inward sigh of relief, and said that we thought he was wise, and so that was settled. I have since heard that he eventually became a curate, married a banker's daughter and did rather well for himself,—which goes to prove—something or other. I must look him up some time.

And so, on the 2nd of April in the year of our Lord, 1893, we arrived in Halifax, and stepped on the shores of Canada, without any interference. The immigration laws were not so strict in those days.



Spasm Four

"GO WEST YOUNG MAN" AND QUICKLY

I suppose that, having got as far as Halifax, the orthodox reader (if any) will expect me to immediately start in on the history and geography of Canada, and give an account of the manners and customs of the Canadian people. At that time they might want (or pretend to want) to know all about its industries, its agriculture, its scenery, its politics, and its economics.

But after all this is MY autobiography and not a biography of Canada, so why should I clutter it up with a lot of information about subjects that aren't half as interesting as I am.

Anyway, when such learned men as Stephen Leacock and Bruce Hutchinson have done the job so well, any efforts I might make to imitate them would be a fizzle.

If you want a book on Canada read them, and if you don't believe them, you should listen to some of our politicians eulogizing "This Fair Canada of Ours" just before an election.

However, to satisfy the reader who likes that kind of thing, I will try and give a sketchy resumé of the different subjects, and then pass on as quickly as possible to the more absorbing topic of ME.

Here they are:—

History: Fairly creditable on the whole in its earlier years, with a few sneaky spots.

Geography: Very extensive and varied.

Customs: Very high, expensive and unnecessary. They make most of the things I like too expensive to buy, and they are supposed to interfere with "Free Trade", whatever that is.

Manners: Well it depends on what you mean by it. All I know is that I have found the people a mighty friendly lot, and when people are friendly, there is never much wrong with their manners.

Industries: I don't know. I never did like the word anyway.

Agriculture: Mostly made up of farms and ranches.

Scenery: The country is just full of it. We have lots of all kinds, and you can take your pick. It used to be free in the early and uncivilized days, but now its kind of expensive. If you want mountains or lakes they will cost you almost as much as your income tax, but you can get other kinds for a lot less and probably enjoy them more.

Politics: Plentiful and odoriferous. You can find them anywhere—and wish you hadn't.

Economics: Completely cockeyed and getting worse. And now if you want any more "facts about Canada" you will have to write to my late unlamented school teachers. Having never been in Canada, they can tell you more about it than I can now after fifty odd (very odd) years of residence.

But, before leaving Halifax, and before you get any further into this book, let's have an understanding.

The main reason for my writing this autobiography is that I want sufficient funds on which to retire. Even from

the time when I was a very young man, my greatest hope and ambition has been to retire. In passing I might say that my wish to retire has been shared by a good many people. Some of them have been rude enough to wonder why I didn't retire before I ever got started.

Naturally, then, I want to get on with the job and get it done as soon as possible and sell as many copies as the public can be persuaded to buy. The more copies they buy, the more permanent will be my retirement.

For this reason I am not going to jeopardise my chances by writing a book that only serious minded people would read. To begin with, there aren't enough of them, and secondly, that kind of people don't buy books—or should I say can't.

They borrow them from the public library—and some forget to return them.

This particular autobiography is going to be unique. Its flirting with the truth may not be original, but its abandoned irresponsibility should ensure that.

Personally I can't see why it shouldn't be the year's "best seller" (if I ever get it finished). Having read some of the "best sellers", I am convinced that I can be just as silly and uninspiring — though perhaps not so pornographic — as any of them if I try hard enough, though the last one I read will be hard to beat. It was as interesting and digestible as a cold suet pudding.

I find the trouble with most of these books is that the author tries to appeal to peoples' sanity, while I have recognized long ago that the number of sane people in the world today would not form a quorum in a village book club, otherwise we would not be in such a mess.

On looking over the back pages of my manuscript I find

that we haven't left Halifax yet, and though it appears a fairly nice little place, battling courageously against dampness and respectability (maybe they are the same thing), it is time we got away from there if we're ever going to get anywhere. Personally, I can't see why people are everlastingly trying to get somewhere. When they do they generally don't like the place they've got to, and wish they hadn't started.

For years now, people have been rushing up and down trying "to get there", and just look where we've landed!

Well, let's get on before I think up something else to delay us.

We bade farewell to the captain, who, though during the voyage had seemed to regard us with a rather fishy eye, was affability itself, almost as if relieved at our departure, and went on to say goodbye to the stewards. Their attitude was much more inspiring. They each came to us separately and shook hands lingeringly as if they were sorry to part with us. I noticed though, that as soon as they had palmed the coins we happened to have in our hands, they quickly disappeared.

After we had collected our luggage and got to land we decided to hop the first train to Calgary. We thought that all we had to do was to buy our tickets, board the train and sit there until we arrived at our destination. But it soon appeared it wasn't quite as simple as that. This was in the days when "speed" had not been paramount, and the art of leisure was still cultivated. Civilization and foreign markets had not yet become an epidemic, and we meandered, instead of rushing around in circles chasing the tails that evolution had done away with.

So when we tried to get a train to Calgary the ticket

agent first had to look up the encyclopaedia to find what continent enveloped Calgary, make enquiries as to whether there were any spare trains that could go there, and how much he could get out of us for tickets.

After looking up the calendar and finding out that it was Tuesday, he said there was a possibility that a train might leave for somewhere in that direction, but that there was no certainty about it, and that we had better hang around for a while on the off chance.

So we hung around until we saw a man that looked like an engineer, and asked him if he was going to Montreal, the first stage on our journey. He seemed uncertain and said he hadn't quite made up his mind, but guessed he'd just as soon go there as anywhere. So we all piled into the train—and at last I've got the reader out of Halifax. (I began to think we were stalled there for life.).

Of the scenery between Halifax and Montreal I have only a very hazy recollection. I know there was snow, lots of trees and rocks, and some farms about as wide as a road allowance.

The government of those days didn't seem to have any agricultural (or any other) policy laid down, so the people seemed to be quite happy, contented and friendly.

Since then, of course, we have become more advanced. Efficiency experts, at so much per effich, have laid down certain rules of life for us, and we have become quite up-to-date and have got rid of that simple care-free happiness that is so typical of the less civilized nations, and which is so detrimental to speed and progress.

We only stayed about four hours in Montreal, so I will not attempt to describe it, though if I was writing an orthodox autobiography I would spend a whole chapter on it and

probably give as faithful a description of the city as some notable people who have been taken on a "personally conducted" tour of Russia give of the history, life, habits and ideals of the Russian people.

It was in Montreal that the first break in our ranks occurred. The "good young man" who was travelling with us had finally decided that his life's work should be in the city of Toronto, and as our plans led in a different direction we had to say goodbye. I say "our plans", but really we had no plans. The only thing we did know was that Toronto had no place in them. We said goodbye to this companion with mixed feelings of regret and relief. He was a nice young chap and we all liked him, but from the start we felt that he was not one of us. He was always courteous, forbearing and tolerant of our shortcomings, but we felt that in his heart he did not fully approve of us—a disapproval that down through the years has been shared by a lot of people.

On our part, though we held him in high esteem, we had an uneasy feeling that one who would deliberately choose to live in Toronto was not for us.

I have deliberately forbore to mention his name, for the reason that he is now high up in clerical circles, and in the very unlikely event of some of his friends reading this book, I feel sure he would be embarrassed by having his name linked with ours.

Please don't misunderstand me. We had absolutely nothing against Toronto. From what I have heard of the city, it is beyond criticism, and even the citizens of Hamilton have to acknowledge its "goodness". But Toronto had been held up to us as a model city, filled with worthy law-abiding citizens. I really think that, in our humility, we did not

feel ourselves worthy of the honour of taking up residence in such a hallowed spot.

After saying goodbye, we decided to take the next train to Calgary. It appeared that there was a train leaving in about four hours, more or less, so we decided to stroll around the city. Strolling around Montreal seems an innocent occupation, but we hadn't been strolling very long before we found ourselves in difficulties that it took two policemen to get us out of. One of the policemen obligingly offered to escort us back to the station and stay with us until we boarded the train. This was fortunate, as, when we arrived at the station we found that the engineer had changed his mind and had decided to leave earlier, and the train was just leaving.

So much to the relief of the Station Master and the policeman. We finally climbed aboard the train and started on the last lap of our journey to the real west.

I won't bore you with the details of the journey. We passed through a whole lot of geography and found it as interesting as a lecture on Scotch metaphysics.

I think the thing that struck me most was the houses. They were mostly made of wood, which, to my mind was a most unorthodox material to use. English houses are, or were, in those days, composed mostly of brick or stone in long uniform rows and terraces with an occasional family mansion or castle thrown in, in the more aristocratic parts, and to see these wooden houses dotted here and there seemed peculiar to say the least.

In those quaint days, when people wanted homes or houses, they just went and got some lumber and built them, or, if they couldn't get the lumber, they just cut some logs

and piled them one on top of another until they were high enough for the roofing.

These funny people used to say, "We need a home, and we have everything around us to build it. Let's get busy". And so, in no time at all they had a home and lived in it.

Of course, in these days of civilization and Bureaus, we just can't do that kind of thing. You just can't go out and build a house just when you feel like it, any more than you can do anything else useful or sensible, unless you have filled out a ream of forms and obtained half a ton of permits.

Today we have Quotas, Priorities, Housing Bureaus, Labour Unions, not to speak of Foreign Exchange, paper shortage (for form filling), Inflation, Deflation, Reflation and several other odd "flations". Then there is the Excess Profits tax, and 116, sub-section x of section 17 of page 225 of Bill 498. All these things have to be considered in order that everything may be done to fit into the "plan" laid down by the "Experts".

- So now it takes sometimes years and a mortgage or two to build a house or pig pen properly, and even then some Zoning Board may come along and make you pull it down again, or a Rental Board may turn you out and put someone else in it.

Nobody—or at least almost nobody—minds paying this price for the inestimable privilege of living in this glorious, if somewhat muddle-headed and confusing civilization, and nobody—or at least almost nobody—would want to go back to the simplicity of pioneer life with all its hardships and freedom.

I can't help wishing, though, sometimes that an Atomic Bomb or something would do something to us, so that we

could actually HAVE to do things for ourselves without any interference from Bureaus or Orders-In-Council.

But the paper shortage being what it is—or made out to be—and my alleged-brilliance of imagination being almost as limited as the music of a saxaphone, I feel I must cut short the account of our journey through Canada and get my reader out to Alberta as quickly as possible.

We arrived in Winnipeg, almost froze solid on the corner of Main and Portage for a time, and eventually arrived in Calgary.



Spasm Five

BORN A WESTERNER

All my life I have wanted to talk about myself (just as you have), and always, just as soon as I got started, the people I was talking to would rudely interrupt by insisting on telling me about *themselves*. In spite of the fact that their wretched little existences meant absolutely nothing to anyone except themselves, they would insist on vocalising their nothingness for my edification. Being shy and diffident, I have always let them get away with it, and in consequence have endured years of excruciating boredom in listening to futile people expatiating on the puerile stupidities of their utterly futile existences.

This is my revenge. Now I've got things my own way, and can write and actually have things printed about ME. It is true that these wretched people don't have to read the book, but at least they can't interrupt.

In my last spasm I had arrived in Winnipeg, Manitoba, but I think I got there too soon. I could have spared a chapter or two on eastern Canada. The trouble is that I, a westerner, feel a little hesitant in discussing such an almost hallowed subject as the EAST. I don't dislike the East. I wouldn't dare; but I feel that such a subject should be approached with a sense of reverence and awe, of which I seem to be strangely lacking. I know that the origin of all

wisdom, knowledge, culture and refinement is in the East, so, while I bow in humble adoration before that sacred and mysterious land, I do not feel that in my present incarnation I shall ever absorb enough of the Esoteric mysticism necessary to discuss, except in hushed undertones, the awesome and rather frightening knowledge of the East.

But there were several reasons for our hurried exit from the East. One was the evident violent urge of the East to get rid of us. Everybody we met insisted on the old mildewed advice to "go West young man and grow up with the country", and so we timidly and obediently "went West", much to the relief of our advisers.

I have found the advice pretty drivelling down through the years. I have never regretted going West, but as for growing up,—I never could see the advantage of it, and the more I saw of the people who had grown up, the less I liked the idea. When I reflect on the people who have made a business of growing up I have found the result rather devastating. It doesn't seem to be a happy process, and judging from the deportment and mental processes of those who have attained their objective, the final result has been disappointment and disillusionment. In fact I have found that the most grown up of the grown-ups have visibly shrunk in the process. This is, of course, a contradiction, but, like most contradictions, painfully true.

In my later years I have often been accused of having never grown up. I used to be distressed by this accusation, but now I'm beginning to hope it is true. At least I'm getting a kick out of life that the grown-ups have missed.

The strongest argument against growing up is statistics. Statistics show "without fear of successful contradiction" (as politicians say) that (except during our frequent

spells of insanity, when we send our youth away to be slaughtered) the percentage of grown-ups who die is far greater than the ungrown-ups.

I am speaking only of the grown-ups who not only die, but actually know they are dead and lie down accordingly. If I included the grown-ups who are dead and still walking around, the percentage would be much greater, and if I added the Members of the Senate, it would be overwhelming.

But getting back to this drivel about "going West" and growing up, etc., first of all, which is West and which is East? Where does the East leave off and where does the West start? Geographically it would be easy to compute the dividing line, but that wouldn't really mean anything. You can't just draw a line through Fort William or some such place and say that East of here is East, and West is West, and it wouldn't matter if you could. It isn't geography that counts. It's really people (except in financial circles). Just what is an Easterner, and what is a Westerner? That there is a difference is beyond dispute, but just what constitutes the difference? It's no good telling me that an Easterner lives in the East and a Westerner in the West, because that's just piffle.

I've met Westerners who have never even seen the West, and Easterners who have lived most of their lives in the West and are still Easterners at heart. In Victoria, the most westerly city of Canada, you can meet (if you have been properly introduced) more Easterners than you will in Nova Scotia.

Yes, I know I'm rambling. That is what I intend to do all through this book. It's MY book and that is my privilege, and you know what you can do about it. Anyway, I'm

leading up to something I started to say some pages back where I got off the track, and that is that Easterners and Westerners are just born that way, and that the locality in which they live has very little to do about it.

When I first came to Alberta I met a peculiar and much maligned creature known as "The Remittance Man." There were quite a few of them around Calgary, and people used to sneer at them and call them parasites, and a lot of other unpleasant things.

They were mostly young men, often "younger sons", who just couldn't conform to the rules and regulations laid down by "Society" in Britain. They were rebels against sham whose parents thought would be better off and less embarrassing to "The Family" in the "Colonies". In order to keep them there, and make sure they didn't show up at awkward times, their relations used to send them a monthly or quarterly remittance as long as they stayed put.

All this was very reprehensible and demoralising, and people who obtained their remittances from other and possibly more legitimate, but equally demoralising sources, rather resented the easy way these young men got—and spent — their money, though they weren't above using every means available to separate these easy-going youngsters from their remittances at the earliest date possible, and kept a greedy and avaricious eye on the English mail.

But though they were the favourite target of the soap-box orators (yes, we had those creatures even in those days, though they had not then invaded our legislatures), these young men were far from being the shiftless, witless spend-thrifts envious people made them out to be. They were, on the whole, energetic, progressive, decent and likable. They were perhaps generous to a fault. (A good many "respect-

able" people took full advantage of this quality). They were reckless, original, and afraid of nothing. They possibly drank more than was good for them, but they had a code of ethics that could put many of our staid and respectable businessmen to shame—which was perhaps one of the reasons for the sneers.

It was "The Remittance Man" — and his dog — that helped to keep Calgary alive in those early days. It was the circulation of their remittances (and didn't they circulate!) that provided buying power for others less fortunate. They were wild, improvident and had no idea of what was "proper" but—they helped build the West. Certainly, there were some "rotters" among them, as there are in all groups and classes. Some of them were distinctly unpleasant characters, but they were the exception. After all I have met pretty unpleasant characters even among the clergy, but that does not mean that all the clergy are off colour. I haven't mixed much with them so cannot speak with authority.

No, gentle reader, you're quite wrong. I was NOT a remittance man myself. I would have liked to have been but the one essential—the remittance—was lacking. It was the old difference between the "haves" and the "have-nots". I was a "have-not".

"The Remittance Man" is no longer with us—at least not in the same form. He started to disappear about the time the British and a man called Kruger started to quarrel over a country that didn't really belong to either of them, and when "The Remittance Man" found out there was going to be a scrap, off he went, and never came back.

But what I started to say some pages back was that we were Westerners before we ever left England, and I think

that is what Kipling meant when he said, "East is east and west is west, and never the twain shall meet."

I am not sneering at Easterners. I have a great respect for them. Unfortunately, I don't know them very well. They hurried me through their domain too fast for me to get to understand them, so I can't say all the nice things about them that I'd like to do. I know they must have sterling qualities because back in the very early days they *were* the West, and it is only through their pioneering that the Western West became possible.

But, although I did not grow up perceptibly, the country did. At least it grew, whether up or down or sideways is not as clear as it might be, and I sometimes think, if such a paradox is possible, that it may have shrunk in the process.

Fifty odd years ago, when I was gently, but firmly, persuaded to "go West" I found the West blissfully ignorant of many things that we have learned since. Our ignorance has gradually disappeared along with the bliss.

When I think of all the things we didn't know in those days, I sometimes wonder how we ever existed at all. We had never heard of calories or vitamins, or bacteria, or germs, and even our knowledge of politics was very elementary.

The science of psychology was unknown. We just got along with each other somehow, and it was not until years later that we had any realization of the sadness of life, when the soap manufacturers enlightened us over the radio.

And then, in those early days we didn't have much in the way of the so-called luxuries and comforts that clutter up our lives today.

There were no motor cars to swell the death rate, no

radios to tell us of all the ailments to which we were exposed and the marvellous cures we were missing. If our breath was bad, or we had unpleasant body odors, nobody was impolite enough to mention it, and the raucous squalling of the saxophone was unheard in the land.

Then, too, we had no rules, regulations, restrictions, codes, trade unions, inspectors and forms, and as far as I know there was no income tax.

We knew there was a government down East somewhere, but we didn't bother much about it, and they didn't bother us much, except about once every four or five years when they distributed rye whiskey and speeches among the voters.

If an atomic bomb had come along and blown Ottawa out of existence we might have heard about it, but we wouldn't have wept—much. (I wonder if we would now).

We lived on beans, sow-belly, dried apples and really enjoyed prunes (I mean the fruit). We rode cayuses (Indian ponies), or wagons or buckboards, and got where we wanted to go in time. (There was more of it in those days). We got drunk when we felt like it, or stayed sober if so inclined, though the latter was somewhat resented as being a bit "snooty".

As for women—well there was rather a shortage, but if the quantity was lacking the quality was there. They were real. You didn't have to wipe the lipstick off your face after being with them, and you didn't have to scrub them to find out what they looked like. I think the most astounding thing about them was that they were able to do their own hair without going to a beauty parlour. This is not written in disparagement of the women of today. They are charming, and they are "wonderfully and beautifully

made up" and are all they should be—and more,—but they have grown up, haven't they?

Yes, there are a lot of things we have now that we couldn't very well do without, but there are also a lot of things we had then that we seem to have lost in the process of growing up. Such things as butter, sugar, meat and clothing don't matter much. They are just material things and we could do without most of them if we had to, except perhaps the clothing, and maybe we could solve that problem with blankets, but we have traded simplicity for confusion and complexity; liberty for the protection (?) of control; tranquility for fear; we have traded the peace of our individual and community lives for internal turmoil and class hatred, and instead of the peaceful trading of nations we now indulge in global slaughters. We have exchanged Christianity for religion, and leisure for speed, and we're going ahead fast, though we are not sure where we are heading.

The growing pains are over. We're grown up. Let's hope we aren't headed for the final stage of senile decay. Europe grew up long ago, but I wouldn't want to live there now.

But I find I have neglected myself horribly in this spasm, and it's about time I got back into the limelight again.

Spasm Six

COWBOYS ARE HUMAN

After a seemingly endless journey over limitless miles of grass, interspersed with patches of snow, "the Big Three" arrived in Calgary. Fortunately, or unfortunately, the Big Three shrunk visibly in the process of arriving. In England we had at least taken up some space in the landscape, and, far from being inconspicuous, were sometimes pointed out as horrible examples, but amidst the vastness of this western prairie we felt that Einstein had discovered us and was busy splitting us. By the time we reached our destination I had begun to wonder if there was not some truth in the old idea that the world was just a flat surface that went on and on into infinity; and that the sun just travelled across it in the day time and sneaked back in the dark to start all over again.

I couldn't help wondering what effect it would have on some of our home politicians if they were suddenly set down in the middle of this hugeness, and whether it would not puncture their ego a bit. I have found out since, of course, that they are puncture-proof, and would probably take full credit somehow for our huge open spaces and prove conclusively their responsibility for the growth of the Rocky Mountains.

I must confess that our arrival in Canada did not create

any noticeable excitement. There were no delegations from the W.C.T.U. or any ladies Aid Societies or Ministerial Associations waiting on the platform, and the Mayor was not there to offer us the Freedom of the City.

This last, by the way, was hardly necessary in Calgary. The freedom was there in big gobs, and all you had to do was take it.

We did.

I do not exactly blame the City Authorities for not recognizing the epoch-making significance of our arrival.

While we had learned a good many facts—and some fiction—about Alberta, nobody knew anything at all about us.

They learned later.

Possibly, if they had known more about us on our arrival, the whole town (including the police force and a few psychiatrists) might have crowded the platform to welcome us—or to see us off. Since then several suggested that the Pacific Ocean held charms that we were short sighted enough not to investigate.

It is true that there were some ladies there, but they did not resemble what we had been accustomed to "view with alarm" as representatives of Ladies Aid Societies. None of them appeared to have had a "hair-do" for some months, and there was a noticeable absence of the rosebud complexion that is so artistically applied in the more refined circles these days, and instead of walking on the miniature stilts that add such grace to the female form in transport, their dainty little feet were incased in moccasins.

Their most noticeable (and for all I know their only) garments were gaily striped Hudson's Bay Blankets. That they had some traces of the form divine underneath, was

evidenced by the fact that they scratched themselves methodically.

• Their hair hung down their backs in long artistic braids, and seemed to be kept in order by a generous application of tallow.

There were no blondes among them.

Also we soon discovered that their chief interest in us was as possible customers. They had something to sell, and civilization had taught them already that the possession of many dollars was absolutely necessary to the happiness and security of the human being.

The time had gone by when they could satisfy their simple needs by trading their plenty among themselves. They had discovered that the only way to prosperity was through "foreign trade." To them we were after a "favourable balance of trade." They were possibly the originators of the "foreign-market" phobia. Since then, of course, the idea has been developed into a science by our politicians and economic experts until it has become the be-all and end-all of production-for-employment. (Whatever that means.)

But though the methods of these simple aborigines were crude, they made up for it with their persistence, and before we left the depot my friends were each loaded down with primitive hat racks tastefully made out of alleged buffalo horns, and I had a pair of beaded moccasins (possibly manufactured in Birmingham) at prices that would make even a government liquor vendor blush. (There was no excess profits tax in those days.)

My first visit to Calgary was, I must confess, a distinct disappointment. From stories I had read, I expected to see a typical western "cow town", with a long row of wooden buildings with false fronts, and interspersed at close

intervals with saloons, with a lot of cow ponies tied at the hitch-racks, while the wild and hilarious cowboys held forth inside with ribald songs, interrupted every now and again by the indiscriminate firing of sixshooters.

Instead I found a small city with many distressing evidences of advanced (for those days) civilization. Some of the buildings were actually made of brick or stone, and there were almost as many churches as saloons, though I wouldn't like to guarantee that they were as well attended or that the congregations were as generous with their collections as the saloon customers were in purchases of the "cup that cheers" (or kills).

There were even lawyers, real estate men and bankers there. So you can see that civilization had really come to Calgary even in those days.

Of course, there were a few "incidents" now and again when round-ups were over and paydays came along, but they were of a very mild character, and the sixshooter was generally noticeable by its absence.

The real cowboy of those days (as he is today outside stampedes) was just an average human being, with perhaps a slightly broader and saner outlook on life than most of us. I think perhaps his most outstanding characteristic was that he took his thinking as he did his whiskey—straight.

He was possibly a little unconventional in his method of expressing his thoughts and feelings, but he left no doubt in the mind as to just what he meant. He was kindly, decent and intelligent. He did not take himself too seriously. He did not put on any frills, and merely laughed at serious minded individuals who tried to impress him with their importance. He was entirely lacking in reverence.

had few inhibitions, had no respect for conventions, saw through shams in a twinkling, and went on his gay irresponsible way doing his job, and getting a kick out of life that was denied his social superiors.

My first visit to Calgary was a lot shorter than I had intended to make it. We had no sooner got comfortably settled in a hotel than my two companions began to evince signs of restlessness. I was shocked to find that they actually wanted to get to work. This was a contingency that I had never contemplated. I had, of course, seen lots of people working at different times, but I never dreamed that there were people who actually WANTED to work. None of the people I had seen working in the past had given me the impression that they were enjoying themselves, in fact they had all looked rather doleful about it, and in spite of all the pious platitudes that I have heard since about the "nobility of labour," I am still convinced that nobody really likes to work, and that given a sufficient income they'd all quit working in a hurry.

I have never been an ardent advocate of work for work's sake and, though I have been under the painful necessity of working at times, I still don't like the idea and avoid it whenever possible.

Back in England I had watched countless thousands toiling away their lives day by day and year by year, and all they seemed to get out of it was drab monotonous looking homes, shabby clothing, fretful faces and a dumb questioning in their eyes as if to say: "And so THIS is life."

Of course, I know that under this topsy-turvy system into which we seem to have retrogressed, nobody is supposed to get paid unless they are working hard at something they don't like doing, but if they'd give me the job of Grand

Dictator of the Universe I would decree that nobody ever got paid for doing something they didn't like doing, and the rate of pay would be regulated by the degree of enjoyment the jobee got out of his work.

I am proud to say I never did like work, and as the years go by I find myself liking it less and less, and anybody who wants to give me something to do is distasteful to me, and I avoid them as much as possible.

Though, on leaving England I had formed certain tentative plans, so far work had formed no part of them. As a matter of fact, after reading some of the tasteful and enticing literature put out by steamship and railway companies, I had decided that I rather liked the idea of cattle ranching. It is true that I did not know quite what a ranch was, but I gathered from these veracious pamphlets that one really didn't have to do anything. The cows just multiplied and you cashed in on the multiplication.

Also my knowledge of cows was infinitesimal. I knew a cow had a leg at each corner, a tail at one end and a pair of nasty looking horns at the other. I understood, too, that in some way or other somebody extracted milk from them for human consumption. Of course, I am speaking now of the early days, before we had been made aware of what a very dangerous animal, bacteriologically speaking, the cow had become. We did not know that she was full of germs, bacteria and other repulsive wiggly things that were the prime cause of all diseases from delirium tremens to housemaid's knee.

Thinking over the oceans of milk the human race has imbibed in the days before we became civilized, and germ conscious I wonder how we survived. (I also sometimes wonder WHY too.)

How poor old Methusaleh managed to live over nine hundred years on a diet of milk is one of the mysteries of life. Maybe there was a shortage of cows in those days.

Now, of course, the cow is taboo and we drink (if we're forced to) a kind of conglomeration that is homogenized, pasteurized, devitalized and generally innocuous and nasty.

If we keep this up we shall probably learn to live forever, and be about as harmless and ornamental as a cabbage.

Then, too, I had been told that these strange creatures had a peculiar habit of perpetually chewing what was called their cud. I didn't know what a cud was or why they chewed it, but figured it must be something to do with their nerves.

Since then I notice that the more enlightened portion of the human race have taken up the habit extensively, and as you walk down our streets, ride on our street cars, or sit in our theatres, you can see the rhythmic oscillation of the human jaw in exact imitation of the humble bovine.

In many other ways my idea of ranching was rather hazy. I had an idea that a rancher spent most of his time in the saddle, galloping across the range, whirling his lariat around his head and singing "The Cowboy's Lament" through his nose. Sometimes he would vary this by leaping off his horse on to the back of an adjacent bull, swing around to his front end and bite his nose. This was called bulldozing.

I have found since, of course, that some of this information was incorrect, and that a rancher had a few other duties, not so romantic, but slightly more useful.

As to the steps to be taken to become a rancher, my information was equally vague. I had conceived the idea (gathered from the aforesaid railway folders) that I could

buy, say, a couple of cows, and that in a short time these two cows would each have a calf, and that in two or more years each calf would also have a calf, and that while the first mentioned calves were growing up and having calves, the original cows would still go on having more calves at least once a year. (I had discarded the idea of twins as being too optimistic.)

Following out these calculations I could see quite plainly that in next to no time at all I would be a rancher with very little effort of my own.

All this appealed to me quite strongly until I discovered that hens were far more prolific than cows. It appears that an average healthy hen will, for some mysterious reason known only to herself, lay about two hundred eggs a year, so, calculating on a conservative estimate that about one hundred and ninety of the 200 produced chickens, and starting with just ten hens, in one year I could have nineteen hundred hens all laying 200 eggs apiece.

The result of my initial calculation was so staggering that I forgot all about cows and started to figure on a hen farm on a ten-year basis when I intended to retire and go back to England and buy a castle and a peerage.

I never did really finish my calculations (or buy my hens). I ran out of multiplication tables to begin with, and then remembered that about fifty per cent. of the hens might be roosters and wouldn't lay eggs anyway. This discouraged me to the extent that I decided to delay operations for a time.

Meanwhile, I found myself in the unfortunate position of having to take a job—or to accept a position on a ranch.

By this time the reader will have formed the opinion that I was a rather irresponsible individual, and it is

slightly more than possible that the reader would be right, but after all, is irresponsibility such an awful crime? When one thinks of the number of serious people in the world today who are simply saturated with their sense of responsibility for the morals and conduct of their fellow beings, and then realises the hopeless mess we are in, one cannot help wondering—well, one cannot help wondering.

The first one to leave our happy trio was Jack Wilson (this was not his real name). He is now a respectable stockbroker with a reputation of sorts so for the sake of old times, I am withholding his real name.

And while I am at it I might as well get rid of the third partner. I am sorry to say he was the greatest disappointment of them all. I had really thought that he would be impervious to the influences of solemnity and respectability that were even then perceptible in Calgary. But he came in one day and announced that he had joined the Presbyterian Church and was entering a law firm in the city.

And so, of the four gay and light-hearted (and light-headed) young tumbleweeds that had left England in search of the horizon, I was the only one left. The others had developed into dull, but respectable pumpkins and left me to laugh alone.

A good many years have passed since then, but I am glad to say that, though some of the irresponsibility has left me, I have still got a laugh or two left, and I'm still not considered respectable in the best circles.

I really got my first job through the good offices of the hotel manager (he was also the owner and bartender). I think he was a little doubtful about the state of my finances (he didn't know the half of it) and wanted to be sure I was

comfortably placed before it became necessary for him to ease me out.

Anyway, he introduced me to a man who he said was a rancher on a large scale, and who needed help and companionship.

These and especially the latter I agreed to furnish for the handsome sum of \$10 a month. It didn't sound like very much, but he explained that for the first six months at least I would cost him more than that in time and worry while he was trying to teach me ranching. As a matter of fact, on looking back, I rather figure he underestimated his losses, though perhaps the companionship of a person like myself made up for it.

Anyway, as I was not expecting any remittances (they call them subsidies now) I thought I had better give the life a trial, and started the new life in "the great open spaces" that, among other things—and people—had induced me to forestall the immigration laws and come to "one of the colonies."

Spasm Seven

LIFE IN THE RAW

I don't know just when Education (with a capital E) is supposed to start and when it ends. Some people (especially school teachers and university professors) seem to think that it starts when you are first dragged unwillingly to school by a more or less fond mother, and ends when you finish "High School," unless you have been made the victim of a "University Education." (In that case you are really and properly finished).

In my case, though I undoubtedly absorbed a certain amount of alleged facts about mathematics, trigonometry (a strange bird that), geometry, geography, history, social studies, economics, etc., I have since found that most of the information was, to say the least of it, inaccurate. A lawyer would call it "incompetent, irrelevant and immaterial." Anyway most of it hasn't jibed with life as I have found it to be (thank goodness).

Take for instance (you take it, I don't want it) the subject of "Social Studies." It contained reams and reams of misinformation about life as it really is, and it takes the average young man or young woman years of painful experience to unlearn all the nonsense and piffle these tomes contained. These "Text Books" were evidently written by

academic geniuses who spoke with authority (and how!) on a subject they knew absolutely nothing about.

As for economics—well the less I say about them at this stage the better. In those early days we just lived and didn't need to bother much about such things. There was plenty for all and we just used it.

I sometimes think that if it wasn't for the sportsmanship and spirit of fair play that our youth teach each other, "education" so-called would be an unmitigated evil.

I remember that we even tried to teach our teachers something of the art of fair play, but on the whole they were neither responsive nor co-operative. Maybe they were allergic to sportsmanship—or maybe I was prejudiced.

What I really started to say when I rambled off the path was, that I sometimes feel that my REAL education started when I got my first job on a cattle ranch.

The fact that I learned to do things, that I had never dreamed of being able to do was perhaps the least important result. My interest in DOING things has always been somewhat negative. In fact, I generally work like heck to get out of doing things.

But what did matter was that I had come into contact with life in the raw and found I liked it.

The people were just the same human beings with the same strength and the same weaknesses as I had left in England. Perhaps both qualities were more pronounced, and less trouble was taken to hide the latter, but essentially they were no different.

The main difference was that these people either never had, or had got rid of, the shams, artificialities and inhibitions that so cramped the lives of the people in the OLD Country. Faulty and misleading human traditions were

mostly ignored, and only the basic decencies of life were recognised as important. They had good healthy virtues and good healthy vices, and while they tried to hide the former, they were a little prone to exaggerate the latter. They were decidedly not religious in the cant sense of the word, yet their religion was very deep and very real, and they lived it seven days a week.

But about the things I learned painfully to do—

They were varied and many. I think the first thing I learned was to cook. This is something that had not been allowed in England. Boys weren't supposed to cook. It just wasn't done in the "Best Families," and our family was always very careful to see that none of us jeopardised the family's position in society. Perhaps we were on the fringe, and couldn't afford to do things that those in the middle could get away with.

Anyway, cooking was taboo for the males, and so was one of the mysteries I had to learn.

I found out later that the Best Families were just feeble imitators of the Indians, who also thought it was degrading for the Male to indulge in such menial work as cooking a meal.

But before I tell you of my first experiment as a promulgator of dyspepsia, perhaps I had better explain that the materials we used would have been frowned upon by all the best publicised "Dietitians" of today.

Everything we cooked—and ate—would give a modern human chronic dyspepsia and bring on every disease known to the Medical Association, and some they don't even know about yet.

Our main source of diet was a weird contraption known

as sow-belly. Yes, I know it sounds a bit vulgar to my refined readers, but then it *was* vulgar—and very nourishing.

Pigs in those days were allowed to grow to an enormous size (this was before the days of "stream-lining"). A pig that weighed less than 400 pounds was considered to have been cut off in its youth, so a chunk of sow-belly was quite a hefty hunk of meat. We bought it by the hundredweight and hung it up somewhere handy until we were ready to use it. (We didn't use coupons.) Go bad? It just couldn't. It was salted. And when I say salted I am treating the subject delicately. It wasn't salt pork; it was porked salt, and it would keep forever. Some of it did. Some I have wrestled with might have been salted by the Fathers of Confederation. I sometimes think they must have had a meal of it when they drew up the British North America Act and the Bank Act.

So sow-belly was our *pièce de resistance* so to speak. We had it for breakfast, dinner and supper, and, strange to say, we enjoyed it and thrived on it. I sometimes wish I could get hold of a hundred pounds of it now, and sneak off where no dietitian could catch me, and eat it in chunks.

My first experience with it was not a happy one. I forgot to parboil it. The result was something I do not care to dwell upon. I felt as if I had swallowed the Atlantic Ocean minus the water.

And then there were beans. I don't know the modern name for this particular kind of bean, and the name we called them couldn't very well be given in this ultra-refined autobiography. They were little white things that looked deceptively harmless, but contained all the vitamins, proteins, calories, and other germs and wiggly things that so

delight the hearts, and pockets—of our modern dietitians. These we also ate three times a day.

Not yet being a full-fledged cowboy—in the eyes of my employer—when the Spring round-up came along I was left alone to take care of the ranch and cook my own meals. As I had acquired a passion for beans I thought I would cook some, and so grabbed a large saucepan and proceeded to fill it about three quarters full and add the necessary water.

After it got well boiling I discovered the beans rising and swelling, and before long the pot was full and the beans sneaking over the edge and on to the floor.

I rushed for another saucepan and dumped half of them into it, but no sooner had I made the change than the first pot was full again and I had to get another pot and take another half out. Soon the second pot was full and I had to scout around for another dish. After this it became a nightmare. I had every pot and frying pan in the place going strong and still the beans kept coming.

In the end my appetite for beans waned, and I dumped the whole caboodle out of the door. A stray horse came along soon after and ate them up and promptly developed a bad dose of colic.

These were the main items of our diet. Of course, potatoes (fried) and other such accessories went with them. Our bread consisted of flour, water, lard and baking powder mixed together and baked in the oven. Sometimes the result was as much of a flop as the U.N.O. or the Atomic Bomb and as stodgy as a Cabinet Minister's speech, but as a rule they were deliciously indigestible or indigestibly delicious.

For dessert we had syrup, dried apples or prunes (we called the latter C.P.R. strawberries because that was the chief delicacy of the dining cars).

Of course, I know now that this diet was all wrong. In fact if a modern dietitian was to make a list of all the things people should not eat these would head the list (especially if I was to be the cook), and could easily prove (how easily they DO PROVE things) that the combination could be guaranteed to kill anybody in a few months. But somehow we managed to thrive on it, and some of us, after many years, are still alive and getting more fun out of life than the anaemic souls who have to starve themselves on a "scientific diet" in order to drag on their existence.

I eventually learned to cook, though people who have tried my cooking—and survived—never seem to wax enthusiastic over it. In fact one bilious-minded lady, after eating a piece of cake I had cooked (she didn't know till afterwards that I was the chef responsible), declared that I was more dangerous to the public safety than Dillinger, Al Capone and the whole Senate rolled into one, and that I should be interdicted from the chef business for life. But, in spite of all the nasty remarks of people with weak stomachs and weaker minds I still maintain that I learned to cook.

In fact I sometimes think that, given the opportunity and enough people upon whom to experiment I might have become a great dietitian and been syndicated (no, not *electrocuted*) by the Press, instead of occupying the lowly and inconspicuous position that has become my lot in life.

If I could not have added much to the gaiety of life (and that's about the only thing worth while) I could at least have partially solved the problem of distribution by removing some of the excess population, and that's about all any doctor can do anyway.

Spasm Eight

COWS, HORSES, PIGS AND HUMANS

Having given you a sketchy account of how I learned to cook, I guess I'd better tell you something of how I learned to ride what was supposed to be a horse. I had other names for him when I got to know him, but superficially he seemed to resemble a member of the equine family, so we'll let it go at that.

I won't go into all the painful details, of course, but will just, so to speak, hit the high spots. It was the low spots that left the deepest impression on my anatomy.

When I first saw the saddles used in the West I came to the conclusion that riding would be easy, and that all the exhibitions I had heard of and seen in Wild West shows of "bronco-busting" were over-rated. I just couldn't see that once you had climbed into one of them you could ever get out again without assistance. I found that assistance was always at hand. I had more than I wanted. The horse provided it.

The saddles had a high curve at the back so that you couldn't get off backwards, and a high fork in front with a horn on top of it so that you couldn't go forward without the horse, and the seat was so wide that you couldn't reach the edge without a tourist ticket. The horn was something

you were only supposed to hang on to when nobody was looking.

I found it very useful in emergencies (they were frequent). You see horses—at least some horses—go up and down more than they go forward. The rider is supposed to go up and down with the horse, keeping perfect time. Unfortunately my sense of timing was imperfect, and I found myself coming down when the horse was going up, and going up when the horse was coming down. In these circumstances I found the horn very useful as a means by which the opposing ideals could arrive at a compromise. Also some horses have unstable minds. They will be quietly going south one minute, suddenly change their minds, spring up in the air and land facing north, and if I didn't have the horn to hang on to I would lose my sense of direction and find myself facing the north end of the horse going south, or vice versa. This explanation is entirely academic and bears no great relation to actual facts.

(I am trying in this autobiography to so mix truth and fiction that nobody will be able to pin me down to any statement I may make in it. You see, having become, in my later years, a specimen of that obnoxious creature, unfavourably known as a politician, I have formed certain habits from which it is hard to break away. Just as the eel, by means of his slippery skin, can slide through mud and slime with safety, so the politician can, if he is wily enough, form a habit of saying, promising and asserting almost anything in such a manner that the art of wiggling is all he needs to bring him through with no outward blemishes.)

On my first ride I climbed on to a horse that I was told had been "gentled." It appears that was a flexible word and didn't mean quite what I thought it did. Maybe he was,

but I never really got a chance to find out the truth of the statement. The horse moved off with a peculiar gait. He seemed to think that unity is strength, so bunched all his four corners together before going up in the air and lighting just about where he started. Unfortunately I lit first. I tried to grab the horn but somehow the horn wasn't there just at that time. So I sat down for a while and let the busy world go by. Even this luxury was denied me. The busy world refused to go by, but kept going round and round.

After a while I decided that the whole thing couldn't have happened really, or that it was just an unfortunate accident that couldn't possibly occur again, so painfully climbed on again, taking such a grip on the horn that if I had to leave hurriedly the saddle would come with me. This time the horse—a cross between a waggon spring and an Indian cayuse—decided to move off in a normal way. I wasn't quite sure at first whether he felt sorry for me as a hopeless nincompoop, or had decided that he needn't bother to exert himself as I would fall off anyway.

Neither guess was right. He was merely looking for a lumpier spot to drop me. He did.

When I came to he was standing a few feet away pretending to be asleep. I know he was shamming because I distinctly saw one eyelid droop significantly, and I think, though I couldn't swear to it, that his upper lip was curled up in a nasty sneer.

I have always prided myself on my iron will. My father had once, in a fit of peevishness, referred to me as an obstinate brat, but he was prejudiced by certain happenings that I need not dwell upon here.

Anyway, the sight of that smug beast made me mad, and finding to my amazement that I was still in one piece, I

limped manfully to him and climbed once more into the saddle. The horn was still there.

This time the gentle creature, more astonished at my persistence than I had been to find I was still alive, decided that the whole business was getting too monotonous, and went off at a smart walk, as if the previous trivial incidents had never happened.

Soon we were loping over the prairie as if we were inseparable friends, and everything went delightfully until we arrived back home. There I narrowly escaped annihilation. I was just going to get off (dismount is the correct term) when he decided to save me the trouble. He just went down on his knees (or a horse's substitute for knees) and started to roll. I guess he thought that was the easiest way to get rid of me.

However, I managed to disentangle myself in time and got away before he made a pancake of me.

By this time I was feeling so proud of myself that I forgave him all my indignities and patted his neck. Unfortunately he must have misunderstood my gesture, for no sooner had I turned my back than he bit it on the very spot that had hit the ground first on both occasions.

That I took most of my meals standing for a time is inconsequential. Anyway, I had had my first riding lesson. It was not an unqualified success, still I had learned a few useful things. In more ways than one, I had broken the ground. The first thing I learned was that the western saddle was quite amenable to reason when you wanted to get off—or even when you didn't.

The second was that there are places more comfortable to light on than others. For instance, a bunch of cactus or a hidden tree stump are not nearly as soothing as a manure

pile. And then, too, I found that after a time your subconscious mind will, if you let it, tell you just which part of your anatomy is the best to meet Mother Earth with the least permanent damage.

After a few rides I really mastered the art of falling off to perfection. In fact I soon became the most graceful and agile faller-off in that part of the country. Somebody aptly described me as the rubber ball. I had learned to bounce.

I think my second ride was the most humiliating. I had been sent to a neighbour's for a can of milk, and was given this same friendly animal to ride. By the way, someone with a warped sense of humour had named the creature "The Lamb." He certainly could frisk and gambol, but his disposition was very much otherwise.

But about the milk: We had run short of canned milk so had to get some in a hurry. You see, on a cattle ranch there are never any milk cows, or if there are, nobody ever milk them. First of all milking cows is undignified. I have met many cowpunchers in my life, but very few of them could milk a cow, or if they could they would never acknowledge it.

In the second place, you just couldn't milk that kind of a cow, unless you first roped and threw it and tied its legs, and even then you might find you had roped the wrong sex. These cows were not exactly wild, but they had a certain dignity and resented undue familiarity. They were Victorian cows. Well, I was sent to a neighbour's a few miles away on "The Lamb" to get some milk. I had a gallon can with a tight lid on my arm. "The Lamb" went off on his usual lope and seemed quite charmed to have me with him again. All went well until I was leaving with the milk. Somehow the lid of the can fell off and landed on the ground with

a loud clatter, which gave "The Lamb" just the excuse for which he had been looting. Up he went, and up I went, and also up went the milk. I beat the milk to the ground by a scant second. In fact the milk never did really reach the ground. I caught it on its way down. Of course everyone—with one exception—thought it was a huge joke. I was the exception.

However, they wiped me off as carefully as possible, filled my can, and tied the lid down. I got away safely—though a trifle sticky—and reached home without further mishap. My employer, after taking one look at me, remarked that, though we did need the milk, I need not have bothered to churn it on the way home.

And, by the way, it is much easier in this country to carry milk in the winter than in the summer. In the summer you have to carry it in its liquid state. In the winter you just get it frozen, wrap it in a newspaper, stick it in a sack and tie it on your saddle.

Eventually I really learned to ride. I don't mean the kind of thing you learn in riding school. I mean *ride*. I was fortunate in that I seemed to get along with horses. I liked—and pitied—the respectable ones, but I really loved those that never could attain respectability. Yes, perhaps you're right. I have the same feeling for people. I like respectable people and pity them for all the lovely things they miss, and I just love the irresponsible wasters who are "their own worst enemies." We need the respectable people to keep us balanced, but I'd hate to have to live with one of them.

I never became an expert bronco-buster. I started too late (five years is the best starting point) and quit the game

too soon, but I learned enough to hold my own on round-ups.

In the initial stage I think the thing that helped most was the fact that I got tired of falling off, and discovered that it was more comfortable to bear the ills I had than to fly to those I knew not of.

This was the beginning of a new and delightful life. It had its hardships and periods of monotony, but the freedom and simplicity of life in the open air, without the stultifying and artificial man-made regulations and restrictions (this was many years ago) that make the atmosphere of the East so stifling, was invigorating enough to resurrect a mummy or a university professor.

We hadn't then learned the art of suspicion that seems so necessary to the progress of civilization. We have acquired it since, at the loss of the gaiety of heart and simple faith in our fellows that made life worth while in those delightful pagan days.

But before I close this spasm I must tell you of one other lesson I learned. It was a negative lesson in a way. It taught me how NOT to do something.

The incident happened a little later than my first initiation into life as it should be lived. I was staying, at that time, with a "remittance man" who had just come over from Ireland and was starting to "ranch" on a small scale.

We had invested in a pig and had been cherishing it and feeding it on the best the land would afford, until we came to the conclusion that it would be more beneficial to the human race dead than alive. I have found since a large number of beings, not pigs, in the generally accepted meaning of the word, who shared this doubtful quality.

Having decided to turn him into pork chops we set about

the painful task of giving him a chance of reincarnation into a larger and nobler form of life.

I won't go into the gruesome details of his passing. Suffice it to say that eventually he had grunted his last grunt, and his soul had passed on to inhabit the body of a banker or an interlocking director. (His ascent was necessarily slow and gradual.)

Now killing a pig isn't all there is to it if you want pork chops. Pigs have bristles, and unless you want them between your teeth they must be removed. The scientific way to do this is to ~~dip~~ the pig in scalding water (after its decease) and then take a contraption shaped like a saucer with a handle and scrape diligently until the bristles are removed. Unfortunately, we hadn't even thought of this and, consequently, hadn't either boiling water or scraper at hand.

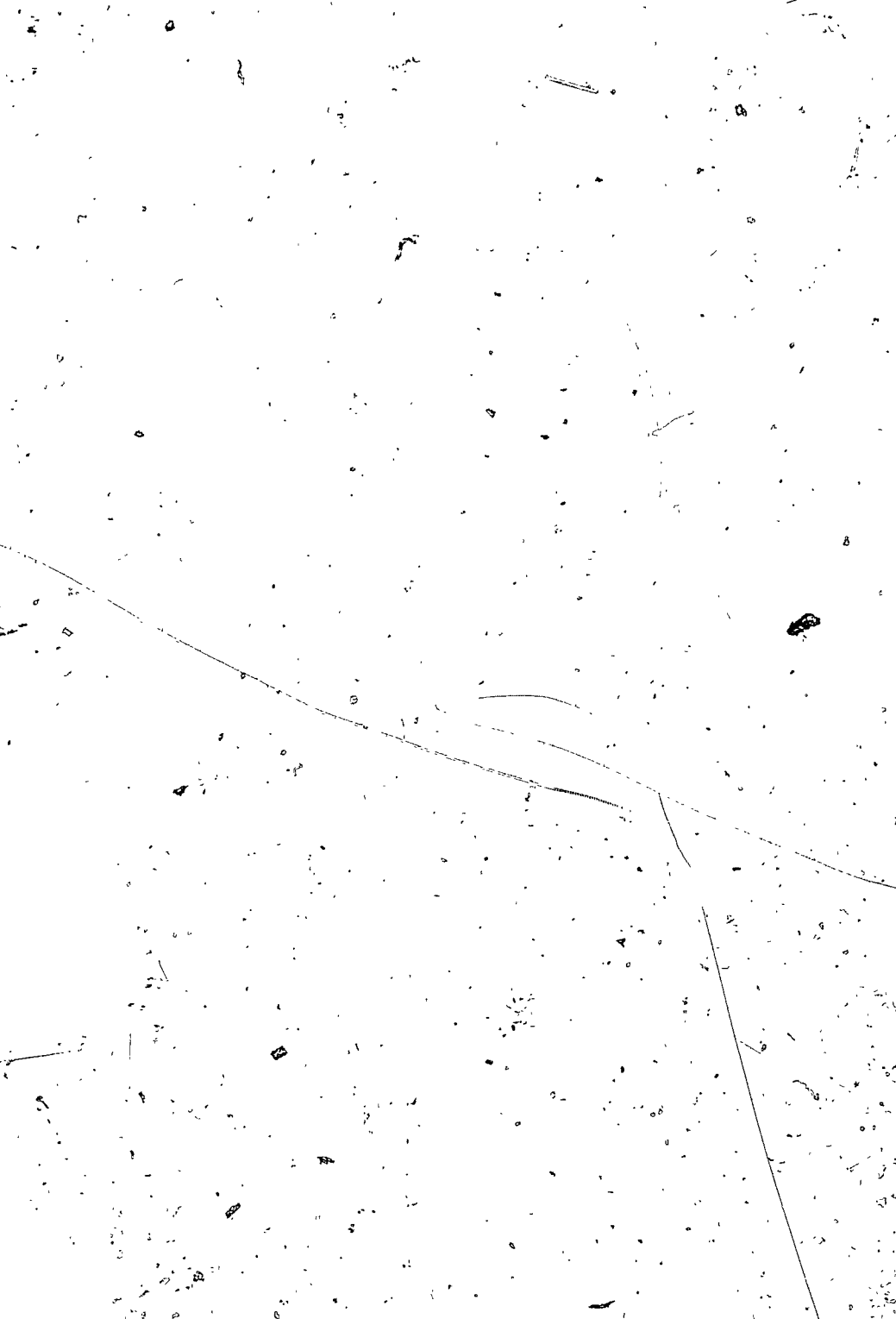
Here was our pig very dead indeed, all covered with ugly black bristles and no way of scraping it. We just didn't fancy our pork chops that way.

Something had to be done or we were going to lose the results of all our loving care. I stroked my chin in perplexity and discovered that I needed a ~~shave~~. This engendered a brilliant thought. I told my friend to get some water boiling, bring his razor, shaving brush and soap and we'd soon have a nice clean pig fit for a bishop to eat. He followed my advice to the letter, except that he brought my razor instead of his own, and we were soon busy lathering the late unlamented.

It was a long and arduous job, but in the end we got him shaved. We didn't use any after shaving powder on him, but on the whole he looked very lovely lying there so clean and peaceful, and we rested from our labours with the

feeling that we had accomplished a difficult task with brilliance and ingenuity.

I cannot, however, recommend altogether this mode of scraping a pig as a general practice. Razors cost quite a bit, and it takes at least one per pig. Likewise it uses quite a lot of soap, and unless you get some soap manufacturer to spend his "excess profits" in bonusing you for the privilege of advertising his wares, it would be cheaper to buy a pig already scraped.



Spasm Nine

THE LIQUID ELECTION

I had been in Canada a little over a year and had reached voting age when vague reports came out of the mysterious East that the Great, Near Great, and Not-so-Great had decided that the time had come to regale the country with another General Election. This news stirred the inhabitants very considerably. Though the people grumbled at "putting the country to a lot of unnecessary expense," they really enjoyed it immensely.

It wasn't so much that the result would mean anything to them, it was something to talk and argue about—and bet on. It aroused something of the same excitement that the Calgary Stampede does now—including the bull-doing.

It broke the monotony and allowed us to work up a mild fever over the important question of "who would win."

An election of those days only differed slightly from the modern election of Soviet Russia today, in that the Soviets have only one party upon whom to exercise their democratic rights, whereas the Canada of the Nineties had—nominally at least—two Parties (with a capital P).

The fact that, once elected, nobody could tell the difference between them was immaterial. We had to go through the motions and the result, whichever Party won, seemed quite satisfactory to most people. A few of the more simple

minded took their Partyism seriously and vowed vehemently that if the wrong (the other fellow's) Party won the result would be ruin. We would lose that marvellous thing "a favourable Balance of Trade" that we had enjoyed under the reign of the Party he supported, and our "Foreign Trade" without which we would all starve to death, would be all shot.

As a matter of fact either Party would have ruined the country long ago if the people hadn't been too sane to let them.

If I remember rightly, whatever the policies of the contending Parties were, the election was always fought on the seemingly momentous question of Tariffs (with a capital T). The Liberal Party swore by Low Tariffs, while the Conservative Party worshipped High Tariffs. The future of Canada depended solely on one of these two. But when either Party "assumed Office" (a delicious term that) the Tariff remained about the same. The Liberals would lower the Tariff on soap and raise it on red herrings (a very precious commodity), and the Conservatives would raise the Tariff on soap and lower it on red herrings. And that was that, and the merry game would go on for another four or five years and everybody went comfortably back to sleep, feeling that it was none of their business anyway. Politics was politics, and if it sometimes smelt a little high, well it always had, and probably always would, so why bother?

I don't know who picked the respective candidates those days. I only know we didn't. It might not have made any appreciable difference if we had. Once the Party Whip got hold of them they would belong body and soul (if any) to the Party Machine, and "The Will of the People" would still have been in the "also ran" class.

As a matter of fact in this particular burlesque we never saw either candidate, and had only a vague idea as to their names. I can't remember the names of either of them now, or which stood for which. A week or two after the excitement none of us could actually swear whether "our" man had won or not, and most of us had only a vague idea as to which bunch had won the right to distribute the "plums". Both candidates, of course, passed into the realm of oblivion, and we never heard from or of them again. We only hoped that the successful one got his share of the "pickings".

All this sounds very reprehensible now, and doubtless our placid acceptance of this stupid game as the natural order of things was at least partly the cause of the economic and social mess we are in today, but in those days the country was in the growing pain stage, and most people were too busy building up the country to be interested in the childish antics of party politicians.

Meanwhile the two Parties carried on the sham battle with a mock fierceness that was almost convincing to the average normal citizen, and unless we got hold of a stray copy of Hansard and read their speeches in the House we really almost thought they were actually doing something important.

As a matter of fact, when one Party got into office, its one and only object was to stay there as long as possible, and, of course, the only aim of His Majesty's Loyal Opposition was to get them out at the earliest possible date so that they could take their place.

Sometimes—just before an election,—and more by good luck than good intentions, they would pass some good legislation that was really beneficial to the people, but mostly

they spent their time calling each other names and making sarcastic remarks across the Floor. All of which seems to prove that if an atomic bomb wiped the whole bunch out "they never would be missed."

But to get back to this first political dog and cat fight in which I took part. In due time we were told who our candidates were supposed to be, and we were urged to "shoulder our responsibilities" and get out and vote for one of them. They were very magnanimous about it. We were told that it made no difference for whom we voted (which was true), but that we just **MUST** vote.

Then the "Free" Press came into the picture. The "Free" Press of those days was divided into two sections. The one was controlled by the Liberal Party and the other by the Conservative Party, so it was up to each section to see that they got their party into power to do **THEM** the most good.

The paper that supported the Liberal candidate spent columns in extolling the virtues of the Liberal candidate, and throwing nasty slurs at the Conservative choice.

The other paper (probably by mutual arrangement) backed the Conservative white (more or less) hope, and left us wondering, seeing that the good are supposed to die young, why he hadn't been taken from us years ago. (Some of us have been wondering this about most of them ever since).

Next came the candidates' agents to map out the campaign and work up the enthusiasm. In those days there was no radio to turn Canada into a pre-election Land of Promises, and the candidates couldn't hop into a car and flit about the country to tell the people how fortunate they were to have such a marvel of integrity and brilliance to

represent them, and they couldn't distribute their photos around the country in thousands (which was perhaps just as well for them).

Possibly they did get around to a few larger centres, but our votes being limited in number we were spared this affliction as we only saw the Agents now and again. The Agents were more interesting in that they carried with them certain tangible evidence of the good-will of the Party.

There was no open bribery. That would have been unethical — besides they might get caught, — but if one found half a dozen bottles of Seagram or Hiram Walker tied to your saddle strings, no questions were asked. It was just a proof of the benevolence of the Party, and a hint that there was more where that came from, — if the right Party won.

How did we know which Party donated to our well-being? That was simplicity itself. The Conservatives favoured (if I remember rightly) Seagram's rye, and the Liberals Hiram Walker's. So if you found a few bottles of Seagram's attached to your conveyance you knew that the Conservative Party was the benefactor, and if Hiram Walker's it was the Liberals. It was a simple way of settling elections, and I sometimes wonder if it wasn't just as effective as our present method.

I was a little more fortunate than most in this respect. Most of the other inhabitants were old timers and the Agents knew pretty well beforehand what to expect of them. I was an unknown quantity, and as I took care not to express any preference for either Party I had them guessing. This was my first vote and as I was blissfully ignorant of the principles (?) involved, both sides did their best to "per-

suade" me that my vote was the most important thing in the history of Canada, and that if I voted right (they each explained carefully what "right" was) it would be the dawn of a new day for Canada. The fate of Democracy was in my hands, and it behoved me to exercise care and judgment in my choice. They each thought they could show me good and sufficient reasons why their particular Party stood for all that was noble and pure, and that before I went home that night I would be convinced. On the other hand, if I voted WRONG, the country would sink into chaos and ruin for at least four or five years.

Consequently, when I rode away I found six Hiram Walker reasons on one side of my saddle and eight Seagram reasons on the other. I can't remember distinctly which won when it came to casting my vote, but I rather fancy it was Seagram. Perhaps the two extra bottles did the trick.

Horrible depravity, yes, but when the noise of battle had subsided, and the captains and the kings had departed, and "little men with little minds rose up to buy and sell again," the "principles involved" were still not within shouting distance.

It would really have saved a lot of money and energy if the government had cut out all the election frills and just let us vote for Seagram or Hiram Walker. The result would have been exactly the same.

Election day finally arrived, and we all congregated at the Post Office to fulfil our solemn duty and exercise the wonderful franchise that had been won for us at Runnymede from King John when he had to sign on the dotted line, and which our noble forefathers had fought to gain for us (you've heard that line, haven't you?):

We marked our ballots—at least once, and then hung

around to get the results. By this time we had worked up a real fervour and were getting quite fanatical about the virtues and chances of our favourite brand, though the Agents, once our ballots were cast, seemed to cool off perceptibly and soon packed up their "reasons"—or what was left of them—and departed.

It was "Up with Seagram and Down with Hiram," or "Up with Hiram and Down with Seagram." By the time we had upped and downed everything in sight we felt so kindly and charitable that we wanted them both to win, and some were advocating an annual election instead of having to wait four years.

Who won? I really can't remember. In fact I don't think most of us ever did find out. We had nobly done our duty, and the result was on the knees of the gods. Towards the end I got a kind of notion that *I* was the successful candidate, and insisted on making a speech to thank my supporters.

We don't conduct elections in that way any more. Everything now is staid and respectable—and not half as much fun.

We have the radio now to explain to us "the Party Platform"—with interchangeable planks. Each plank gets its share of eulogy or abuse. When the election is over the platform is taken down and the planks are carefully stowed away for another four years or so.

Likewise the planks are changed for different localities. For instance, in the rural areas Agriculture (with a capital A) is the main plank, whereas in the urban centres, Industry (with a capital I) is spotlighted.

We don't have just the two Parties any more. They have split up into six or eight, though the change is merely

nominal. They are still pretty well the same old Party with the same old tricks. The labels are more varied and more colourful, but the contents in the cans is still the same unsavoury goulash, and I'm afraid that as long as we make "My Party, right or wrong" our motto, our political Democracy of which we so proudly boast will remain the same old farce it has always been.

Somebody once said that the government that governed least governed best. If this is true the governments of those days must have been model governments. They just didn't have time to do any governing. They were too busy with their sham battle.

By the way, if you really want to know which Party won that election, you will have to look up the Parliamentary Guide or the Encyclopaedia to find out. I think it was in the year 1894 or 5.

None of us ever knew—or cared. Why desire?

Spasm Ten

UP IN THE FOOT HILLS

Though I enjoyed life on a ranch and managed to pass muster as a fair to average cowpuncher, and could hold up my end at round-up work and other less spectacular but just as useful work, such as haying, fencing, etc., I never became the expert exhibition "cowboy" that you sometimes see swaggering down the streets of our Western cities, with huge hats covering huger deficiencies. Also I never aspired to singing through my nose the alleged cowboy ditties that the radio cowboy sings, and which would make most self-respecting cows have two epileptic fits and stampede between them.

It is a fact that cowboys do sing on night herd. For some mysterious reason it seems to have a soothing effect on the cattle, but if we ever sang the drivel the radio cowboy squawks, or ever attempted to soothe the savage beast through our nasal organs as the radio cowboy (who has probably only seen a cow on the inside of a can) there would be a real and lasting stampede.

And while I'm at it let me debunk another fond illusion. Some of you have seen some of the stunts pulled off by alleged cowboys at Stampedes and "Wild West Shows." Let me assure you that if we had tried that kind of stuff on a real cattle ranch we would have been fired on the spot.

The real rancher and the real cowpuncher has an innate sense of decency that at least matches that of the average respectable town citizen, and he won't tolerate cruelty. (Besides cattle are too valuable to treat that way).

Just one other debunker. The real cowpuncher does *not* dress for the occasion. Our usual outfit was a broad brimmed Stetson hat (as a protection from the sun in summer time and snow-blind in the winter), a pair of ordinary blue overalls, with chaps (I don't even know if that's the way they're spelt) of tanned leather, and a pair of high heeled riding boots. The high heels were meant to protect your feet from slipping too far through the stirrup. If you got thrown it was possible to get so caught up that you could be dragged to an unpleasant death by a fear-maddened bronco.

I merely give these details to give you an idea that the REAL cowboy dressed for utility and reality and not for show. Every article he wore was for a purpose, and he didn't go for frills. In the ten to sixteen working hours (we had no "Cowpunchers' Union" with headquarters in New York or Chicago) he was strictly utilitarian in his dress and outlook. That does not mean that he could not play. He could—and did. Sometimes his play was a little rough, but it was a lot cleaner than some of the ideas of "sport" indulged in nowadays.

And then a word about the six-shooters that we were supposed to carry at all times and fire off indiscriminately at passing strangers. The painful truth is that the average puncher just couldn't be bothered with such fripperies. Occasionally they were used to take a pot shot at a stray coyote or wolf that bothered the calves, but the custom of sneaking up on people and plugging bullet holes in them

was frowned upon. As a matter of fact there was nobody much to shoot at in those days. Things are different now. Civilization hadn't reached us then.

I find that, while I have been rambling on, I have left the reader in absolute ignorance of where I am, and most readers like to know something about the whereabouts in which the hero (or villain) of the piece is operating.

The place I landed in at this particular stage of my wanderings was named Priddis and was located in the foot-hills south-west of Calgary.

Priddis wasn't even a hamlet. It had a post-office and a post-master, who was also the mail carrier, and that and he were the centre of the community.

A man named Charlie Priddis was the pioneer founder, post-master, mayor, council, and general enlivener of the district, and fulfilled all the duties—especially the last—admirably.

When I first met him he was getting on in years. He wore a little grey moustache and goatee that tried—and failed—to give him an air of staidness that fooled nobody. He was the one and only Charlie Priddis; the most delightful lovable and irresponsible character I have ever met.

To see and hear him driving in from Calgary on mail day, seated on the front of his buckboard, waving the lines, cracking his whip and yelling at the top of his voice "Make way for Her Majesty's Mail" was something never to be forgotten.

Some of us generally had to back track to pick up mail and parcels that he had strewn along the trail, but somehow nothing important ever seemed to get permanently lost, and even remittances generally turned up sooner or later.

I could write a book about Charlie Priddis and fill it with entertaining episodes of which he was the centre, but that isn't my job at present. Maybe at some future date I can brighten your lives—or shock your respectability—with an account of his doings.

He had a code of morals all his own and kept rigidly to it. It perhaps wasn't altogether the kind of code that would be approved of in the best regulated society, but it was good enough to command the respect of those who knew him. He was never known to do a mean act or say an uncharitable word, and was always the first to help in an emergency. He died long ago, but has left a memory behind him that some of us treasure to this day.

The foothills of the Rocky Mountains contain some of the most beautiful spots in Canada. To get up in the morning and see the rising sun shining on the snowy peaks, or to watch the sun sink behind the ragged line of snow is an experience worth remembering.

The Rockies themselves are very impressive—in the distance—but like a lot of notable people, they look better a long way off. I loved to look at them from the distance of the foothills, but I never liked being right in them. In the distance the imagination had a chance to work, but when you got up to them you discovered them to be just lumps of rather ugly rock.

Or perhaps it was that they made me feel too small. To some people the Alberta foothills are not the pleasantest place in which to live when the thermometer drops to 30 or 40 degrees below zero, and you have to thaw the stove out in the morning before you light it, or take an axe to cut a slice of bread to make toast. Going out first thing in the morning to feed the stock is not the kind of pastime

that refined people who like their street warmed before they venture out, hanker after, but somehow, though we did a lot of cussing, we really enjoyed it, and the only time we got sick was when a revengeful cayuse kicked us in a tender spot, or an ill-mannered steer gouged bits out of our anatomy.

We were a mixed bunch out there, but we got along remarkably well considering that we had no radios to tell us of the sorrows of Little Orphan Annie, the Trials of the Twerp Family, or the marvellous cures for Body Odors. The C.B.C. had not been inflicted on us in those simple days, and the screech of the saxophone was not heard in the land, and there were not even any psychiatrists to tell us whom to love and how and why. We had much for which to be thankful, though we didn't realize it until much later.

Needless to say, we had our little parties, and though sometimes they ended up in a free-for-all we enjoyed every minute of them and were all good friends again the next day.

I sometimes look back with a reprehensible nostalgia to the pleasant little interludes that helped to break the monotony of the zero weather. There was one particular log shack that we used to frequent more often than any other. It belonged to two brothers named—shall we say?—Jackson. These two boys owned a few—very few—cows, a number of saddle ponies, a few chickens, a fair supply—at the beginning of the month when the English mail came in—of money, and the main asset—two banjos, at the playing of which they were far more expert than they were at cattle ranching.

When a party was arranged at their shack we were all requested to bring our own chairs, and it must have been a queer sight for strangers to see numerous riders wending

their way from different directions, each with a chair tied on the back of his saddle, and all converging on the one spot.

It must have been a stranger sight still though to see these same riders the next morning homeward plodding their weary way, some with the back of a chair and one leg tied on behind and others with even less than that.

You see we used to argue a bit about things, and as axes and guns were barred, we just had to use something, and as the leg of a chair is about the most convincing argument we could find, you could hardly blame us for using it.

Though I am using the personal pronoun in this description I hope my gentle readers will realize that I, personally, was far too timid to take part in these vulgar brawls, and if I sometimes got what the innocent bystander usually gets, well, that was just my bad luck and couldn't be classed as incriminating evidence.

If my reader refuses to believe this, he or she either must have a nasty suspicious mind or they have terribly misjudged my character, and they simply cannot get any moral out of this book at all.

Then we had one other diversion. Once a month we used to go to church. Yes, I know this sounds queer after reading the last paragraph or two, but I've already told you we were a queer bunch—and I haven't told the half of it. We enjoyed our mild little parties, our friendly little arguments, and we enjoyed our church.

On second thought, I'm not so sure that we were very different from other people. I seem to have heard of some similar goings on in city life, though city people being more civilized, are more subtle in their methods. They, too, have their little parties, though the liquid refreshment is

more expensive, more mixed and more deadly; the arguments are generally conducted in a business way, and more safely over the 'phone, and the church—well, that is perhaps a little more ornate, though no more beautiful than was our church.

It appears that a clerical gentleman from England had come out here for his health, and being an energetic and kindly man, and being rather horrified to find we had no church building, had actually built one himself. I have seen (the outside at least) many churches, but I have yet to find a prettier or more unique one than this little building-nestling in the foothills. It was built of spruce logs with the rich brown bark left on, standing on end and morticed top and bottom. The altar, pulpit and seats were all spruce, and the trimming a rich red.

The clergyman was a tall slim man with a flowing brown beard, a delightful voice and a quiet kindly manner, and a natural dignity that endeared him to all of us. His is one name that I can mention without being afraid of shocking the sensibilities of his friends. It was Webb-Peploe. I don't quite know what qualities it takes to make a real saint, but he had them all.

So we went to church. Not out of a sense of duty, but because we really enjoyed it. What is more, when church was over we all trooped over to Webb-Peploe's house and drank tea—of all things—with him and his wife. One thing we loved about this man was that, though he knew all our frailties, and knew all about the commandments we (I mean the others) broke, and the things we did and said of which he couldn't possibly have approved, yet he never preached AT us. His quiet talks were clear, logical and earnest and—perhaps—a trifle old fashioned, and cut clear through all the

foolish sophistries we sometimes indulged in in the bunk-house. He was distinctly not one of the gentry who so pompously label themselves "Higher Critics." He talked as one of Christ's disciples might have talked. I think, too, he talked to men who were perhaps closer to the people Christ's disciples talked to than is general these days.

Even now I can remember parts of his sermons. No, they weren't sermons in the usual sense of the word. They were quiet earnest chats from a man who loved his fellow-man.

May his memory live long among those who were privileged to know him.

Spasm Eleven

LEARNING ABOUT PEOPLE

Though I really enjoyed my life on a cattle ranch, even though I occasionally had to work harder than I liked, yet I felt that I had travelled too many thousands of miles to settle down for the rest of my life in the first spot at which I landed. Besides, it was hardly fair to the rest of the population not at least to give them the opportunity of realizing what they had missed by not having me with them sooner.

So after a while I felt it was time to drift to other scenes and other experiences. I had no particular plans, and in those days there were no beneficent Bureaus to plan our lives for us. The Little Men were not reigning then, and so I was free to meander on at will without having to apply for a special permit.

I know there are people who believe that everyone's life should be mapped out ahead, and though such people generally end up as earnest, respectable citizens bent on pouring everybody they can into the particular mould they favour, whether they like it or not, still I have known a lot of happier people.

True, they were generally considered to be "sound", and they could even borrow money from the Bank because they had sufficient "collateral" (whatever that is), and they were

much sought after by Boards of Trade and Chambers of Commerce, took up the collection in the more fashionable churches, and even made stodgy after-dinner speeches on the subject of "How to be successful though dumb," but I have a sneaking idea that they must have secretly been unutterably bored with themselves. Nobody could live so close to that kind of people year after year without getting completely fed up with life.

Sometimes when I read the obituary notices of some of these "worthy" citizens, and find the papers stating that they were supposed to have departed this life through the agency of some disease especially reserved for Captains of Industry or Bank Presidents, I wonder if they weren't simply "bored to death".

I suppose living in a rut that you can't get out of, and that nobody can get into with you, has its advantages. For one thing, it's nice and safe and cozy, and there is nothing unpredictable about the next step. All you have to do is to crawl along in it and not look up. Although you can't see out over the sides, you can plod along without much thinking, and thinking is hard work, and sometimes very dangerous.

Of course, nowadays none of us nobodies really need to think. The State will do it for us, and though I haven't found out yet with what they have to think, and although they generally think in reverse, still we're relieved of the responsibility and can concentrate on keeping in line.

Then, with the radio and the press to tell us what to think when we have to, things are a lot easier than when we had to think for ourselves. It used to be a difficult situation for some of us before the "Higher Education" came into vogue.

Anyway, I decided to drift for a time. I wasn't fussy about where I drifted. I was young even then, and had lots of time ahead of me, or if I found suddenly I hadn't, it wouldn't matter anyway.

By the way what a lot of fuss some people make about "not wasting a minute." "Time Marches On," they say, and, once the precious minutes have gone they cannot be recalled. And so what? If you have enjoyed them, and added to the gaiety of life for some poor souls who needed a little of God's gaiety, why bother? We have been busy "improving each shining hour" for a long time, and see where it has landed us.

As a matter of fact, time doesn't march on. We're right in the centre of it, and there's no distribution problem about it. There's plenty for all.

It's the dull human worms who are busy rooting in the mud for "success" without even time to look up, who are doing the wasting. They are not only wasting precious minutes and years, they are wasting life itself.

Having started to drift, I found it hard to stop. I drifted into and out of lumber camps, road gangs, mining camps, horse ranches, construction gangs, editorial offices, and once I actually drifted on to the Stage.

This last venture was short and sweet. The company ended up broke, and we each had to find our way out the best way we could. I have sometimes wondered if it was not my acting that provided the finishing touches. If there are worse actors in the world than I was (outside that particular company) I have yet to meet them.

I didn't get exactly rich on my travels, though I generally, though not always, had enough loose change to carry on. I guess the old saying that "a rolling stone gathers

no moss" may be correct, but then I never was particularly enamoured of moss; I tried to smoke some once when I was out of tobacco and it made me sick.

But though I gathered no moss, I did soak in a lot of useful knowledge, and something far more precious than that. Something that just can't be put into words, and can't be valued in dollars and cents, but makes one rich just the same.

I think one of my richest experiences was in a hoboes' camp. Having acquired a few surplus dollars by selling a self-invented patent medicine that was perfectly harmless, but worked wonders on the patient's imagination, and performed wonderful cures for that reason (any doctor can tell you about it), that I felt I wouldn't require—at least until the next day—I was a welcome guest.

As a matter of fact when I got to know them better I found I would have been welcome anyway. There were some rather unsavoury characters among them, doubtless, but even these had some sterling qualities, if you took the trouble to dig deep enough to find them. They were no doubt a shiftless lot according to orthodox standards, and weren't above "lifting" odd articles that would vary their diet (they were mostly on a diet), or help out the deficiencies in their clothing. Two-inch nails and safety pins were invaluable in holding the latter together. So you see, after all, their wants were small, and they were easily satisfied, and if they did not appear on the surface to be an asset to the State, at least they didn't cost the taxpayer much.

Even they had their code of ethics that was worth while learning and remembering. Without wishing to appear cynical I must confess that I have found men in the respectable business world that could have learned—if they would

—some healthy lessons from these same hoboes, and some ladies leaning over bridge tables that were far less pleasant with whom to associate.

And then their store of knowledge of the affairs of the world was astounding, and some of their comments might have made some of our so-called "Leaders" squirm.

I learned more real geography from them than all my teachers had been able to cram into me. They seemed to have been almost everywhere, and though—or perhaps because—they didn't travel on passenger trains, they knew more intimate details of countries far and near than any tourist I had ever met.

We call them "bums" and "parasites", but, though they freely acknowledged that they did not like work, and avoided it whenever possible, yet they asked very little from society and stole as little as possible—and never from the poor or each other. They had a certain delicacy too. I was with them quite a time, but they never asked me my name and business, and left it to me to give them just as much information as I saw fit. They were a genial lot, and their wit was at least equal to that of any afternoon speaker or platform orator to whom I ever had to listen.

There was a lack of up-staginess and simplicity that reminded one of the real aristocracy of some of the old countries, and which is never acquired by the merely dollar rich.

It is true they didn't pay income tax—but then neither would any of us if we had their courage. Anyway, they never collected any income, making the distribution problem that much simpler for the rest of us.

When they died the State never collected Succession

Duties from their estates, but on the other hand they never asked for, or desired, an ornate funeral.

Their motto seemed to be "Man wants but little here below, nor wants that little long." Which after all is quite as altruistic as the alleged Bankers' hymn: "The richest Lord we lend to Thee, Repaid a thousandfold, shall be." Yes, I learned a lot from them.

Of course, in my drifting and tackling different kinds of ways of making a living, I learned to do things I had never dreamed of doing, and all these have come in handy since, and some people must have derived some material benefit from the things I helped to create. If the wrong people got the kudos, that was not my fault. It is the natural result of our "sound money" system.

Some of the things were dams, power houses, railroads, highways, bridges, dwellings and even one church. Some of these things still exist as monuments to my reluctant industry. Whether they're doing any good or not is a matter of opinion.

But what I did accumulate, and what has since been a source of inestimable joy to me for many years, was at least a partial knowledge of my fellow humans. I don't quite know what the expression "a normal man" means. I have often heard people speak of the normal man, but I have never met one. I don't really believe there is such a creature, and if there is, he must be very abnormal to be so normal—if you understand what I mean.

In my rambling I have met men and women of all races and creeds, and have found that, though they differed in manners, habits and individuality, underneath the surface they shared the same frailties and virtues. Though each one was a separate entity in himself, or herself, and

was totally different from anyone else, yet there was a common bond of spiritual thinking between them. Even the savage who worshipped a tree trunk had it in a measure.

I have met men and women who were, or seemed to be, vicious through and through, and they were not always members of the so-called criminal classes either, but I have found that when you dig down deep beneath the surface you find a man or woman who is decent, kindly and friendly at heart, and if they are not, it is because our pagan, social and economic system has been cruel to them and embittered them. People are just as fine as they are allowed to be.

I find, too, as the years go on that some of that kindly friendliness has seeped almost unconsciously into my own spiritual being, making me more bearable to society.

And race and creed has nothing to do with this innate decency. Be they Jew or Gentile, Mohammedan or Buddhist, Catholic or Protestant, Capitalist or Socialist, it is there in each one of them, break the crust and you can always find it—if you look close enough.

All these fiendish "race hatreds" are deliberately and artificially engendered and fostered for a purpose, and are the cause of the senseless and criminal slaughters in which we have been indulging for the last few decades. When we get down to the realization that we're all rather decent humans, and have faith in each other, the war-mongers will have rather slim pickings, and our youth will be allowed to grow up to full manhood before they are made bomb-fodder to satisfy the selfish ends of a few real world criminals.

Our trouble seems to be that, though we are almost criminally credulous when it comes to the propaganda put out to swing us aside from the delightful companionship we

could have together, we lack the faith in each other that would dissolve most of our problems into thin air.

There is nothing original in this. You probably have thought it all out for yourself, but I have got such a kick out of life through finding out the niceness of my fellow humans that I thought it was worth passing on.

But that is enough moralizing for one spasm. I must get on with my job.

My wanderings before I partially settled down (even now the settling is only partial) took me some glorious years, and carried me over a lot of country. Some parts of the United States and several provinces of Canada were unconsciously blessed by my presence at different times, and even a trip on a cattle boat back to England was included in the itinerary.

The last named trip was not an unqualified success. I had a notion I would like to go back there to live, but, though I still love the old land, I found, after the glorious freedom of the early days in Western Canada, I just couldn't conform to the restrictions and conventions that were a tradition there. I know that "Britons never, never shall be slaves," but there was a kind of voluntary slavery over there (it's not so voluntary now), that was not for me. I suppose I was naturally a non-conformist.

One peculiar little idiosyncrasy they appeared to have, and maybe it isn't just peculiar to England, was that when I tried to tell them the truth about western Canada they just wouldn't believe a word of it, and it was only when I concocted the most fantastic yarns I could think up that they believed me.

Perhaps it is that peculiarity that makes us mistrust our

own common-sense, and swallow wholesale the weird propaganda that is fed us via various media.

I love England with an enduring love. I love its green fields, its hedges, its cozy farms, its churches and even its "pubs". There is something fascinating about its roads and lanes that meander in all directions and never seem to have any particular place to go (something like a politician's speech). I even love London's yellow pea-soup fogs, but to live there would not be good for me, and I'm quite sure (and this conviction was shared by many others over there) that it wouldn't be good for England.

And so I returned, sneaked past the immigration authorities, and eventually landed back in Alberta for Alberta's good!



Spasm Twelve

A WEDDING AND INCREASED IRRESPONSIBILITIES

In the last spasm I had just arrived back from a personally conducted tour of England. Both on the trip over and my return I came in contact with some very interesting characters.

On the trip over, most of the passengers were long horn Texas steers. (A steer is a cow of the male persuasion). Anybody who thinks that a cow is just a bovine, placid cud-chewing animal that just ruminates while the world goes on, had better take a trip with a boatload of them. When it comes to bovinity, some of the passengers on the return trip had them beaten a thousand ways. Only the fact that they were tied up prevented a strike that would have made the C.I.O. look like novices.

In spite of the fact that I fed and watered them regularly without ration cards or coupons, they didn't like me and never missed an opportunity to register that dislike on any portion of my anatomy that they could impress.

They had their good points, but the points were too pointed for my liking. They, like a lot of politicians and professors I have met, just loved to drive home an argument, and their language about compulsory deportation and controls was simply shocking. In my early days I had heard much the same language—with about the same results—

used in Hyde Park, London, on Sunday afternoons, the only difference being that their voices were slightly more melodious than those of the Hyde Park orators.

After all, one couldn't blame them much for their attitude. Though they had never heard of the Atlantic Charter, they still didn't like being pushed around. If they had lived in these later days and been reduced to the status of human beings, they might have been more amenable to discipline.

In comparison, the return trip, though more comfortable, was dull and uninteresting. Of course, the passengers were more intelligent and could discuss in smoother language the political and denominational short-comings of the parties or sects that happened to differ from their own, but they were less unpredictable, and consequently less exciting.

These human passengers were very unfriendly the first few days, overwhelmingly friendly for the last day or two, and forgot all about each other after they landed. I made several life-long friendships that lasted right up to the end of the voyage.

Also we were divided into classes. The First Class passengers, being the élite, very properly ignored the presence of the Second Class passengers, who were what the Russians would call nowadays the Bourgeois, and consequently to be tolerated as a necessary evil, but were on no account to be encouraged into undue familiarity.

Also the First Class "dressed for dinner," which was a mark of distinction—and discomfort—that could not be ignored. Since then, the situation has changed somewhat. Now people "in trade" (wholesale, of course), can be taken into society with no more protest than a genteel sniff.

The Second Class tried their best to ignore the First

Class as much as possible, though not with much success, and only spoke sneeringly of them under their breath. They resented the "snobbishness" of the "upper classes" — and wished they could afford to join them.

But there was one thing that both classes agreed on, and that was that the presence of the Third Class on board was an insult, and that there should be some kind of law against it.

As a matter of fact, the Third Class passengers seemed to be the happiest and most care-free of the lot. They had no social standing to maintain so were able to act naturally. They played weird instruments, sang weird, plaintive, but strangely beautiful folk songs, dance queer dances with a grace and abandon that made some of us envious and wish we could unbend enough to try ourselves. There was nothing of this kind on the cattle boat.

The Captain was rather an awesome creature who lived in a world apart, and frowned on everybody except the First Class passengers.

I have met captains, as I have met bankers, who, in private life, were genial souls with whom one could fraternise quite freely, but a Captain on his Bridge, or a Banker seated behind his desk, frigidly but politely "regretting the necessity" of calling in your loan, or suggesting that you cover your overdraft at the earliest possible moment, are different creatures. They radiate an aura that sets them apart from common clay.

The food was variable. Some days when the sea was calm it tasted excellent, and other days it was actually repellent, and one did not want even to smell it. Some people found it actually nauseating.

However, most, or at least some people, have experi-

enced the delights and horrors of a sea voyage, or if you haven't you will have had all the grisly details recounted for you by friends who seem to take the same delight in relating their experiences as they do in describing all the intimate inch by inch account of their latest major (there doesn't seem to be any minor) operation.

By the way, I forgot to tell you that in the course of my wanderings I had got married. I suppose that is rather a casual way of mentioning it, but so many people have got married that it has ceased to be an outstanding bit of news. It is when you kind of forget to get married that causes the flurry. At least it used to in those days. Today the omission of the initial ceremony is considered as merely an indication of absent-mindedness, and anyway it saves the cost of the divorce court later, and what with the rising cost of living, the income tax, that is something to be considered.

My marriage was somewhat of a shock to my relatives and friends in England. To begin with, they couldn't understand any girl—even a "Colonial"—having the courage to tie herself for life to the one member of the family for whom they themselves had a much deeper affection "in absentia" than at close quarters. Some of them loved to think of me as a "distant" relative. Then there was the question of her colour and language. There seemed to be a vague idea in those pre-historic days that a Canadian—or as they might have put it, a Native,—if not jet black, was at least a rich and coppery brown, and talked in a guttural tongue that was as confusing as a lawyer trying to "clarify" an intricate point of law.

It was some time before they realized that my wife had fairer hair, bluer eyes, spoke better "English", and was at

least as intelligent (in spite of her apparent lapse) as the average "Britisher".

To say that I have never regretted the step would be too trite and idiotic. Today it's the same jolly, care-free romance that it was years ago. No doubt it doubled the irresponsibility of the family, but it also trebled its gaiety.

We have been bumped and pushed, and almost squashed occasionally, and "broke" most of the time, but we've enjoyed it all. Though we both agreed very solemnly that the responsibility of married life called for a certain degree of "settling down" and taking life seriously, we both found it rather difficult. We just weren't built that way.

The unconscious funniness of serious minded people with their solemn pomposity tended to make us bubble over at the most awkward times, and spoil all our good resolutions.

Today we have almost accomplished the objective, but even now we occasionally break out in irrepressible gaiety caused by the unreasoning joy of being alive and together.

Possibly it was a rash undertaking, but it's been fun all the way through. Maybe "Life is real, Life is earnest", but that need not mean that you can't get a big "kick" out of it if you don't take yourself too seriously. A "stuffed shirt" never did anything but creak.

We did honestly try to settle down, and might eventually have whittled ourselves down to fit into a respectable rut in time, but unfortunately just about that time the Kaiser started to act up and dance the war dance. Maybe someone else pulled the strings that made him jump, but anyway, the hate propaganda started its deadly work. "Democracy"—whatever that was supposed to be—was in danger; the Hun was at the gate; civilization—again, whatever that

was supposed to be—was threatened, and it behoved every patriotic citizen to join the colours and get behind the band.

So, being a patriotic citizen, I started wandering again—this time on a troop-ship.

I'm not going to bother you with my army experiences. You have had that stuff fed you ad nauseum, and there are books galore to tell you all that happened—and a lot that didn't. Also, there is Bairnsfather's pictorial account, which is probably the most veracious of the lot. Suffice it to say that I spent a good deal of time being promoted to the rank of corporal, and an equal amount being demoted again.

Possibly I was, in a remote way, partially responsible for this state of affairs, but it is only fair to myself to say that from the very beginning the Sergeant-Major took an instant and entirely unreasonable dislike to me, and lost no chance to pick on me. If my boots happened to be dirty or my brass buttons unshined, or I was late for parade, or some other trivial and inconsequential offence he blamed me as if it was all my fault, not realizing that I had more important things to do than to shine shoes or buttons, or stand at attention while he showed off for the benefit of the O.C.

Anyway, he had the whip hand and I had to suffer. I bore it all with commendable docility, though I must confess that I did my best—quite successfully at times—to make him wish that either he or I had never been born. I still can't think of any good and sufficient reason why he was. Maybe it was a case of reincarnation in reverse, so to speak. He was not a nice character, but if he didn't have any good points, he certainly had some beautiful bulges, and, oh, couldn't he goose-step gracefully in front of the battalion

on parade, while we were waiting for the O.C., who by the way was often late!

I learned to peel potatoes scientifically, though even this occupation was to be denied me after a short while, when some scientific but evil-minded general, from the depths of his well cushioned chair, suddenly discovered that potato skins were good for the troops (though NOT for the officers). After that we got boiled and mashed potatoes with the skins on and the eyes and worms in. After that I was out of a job again, and had to content myself with scrubbing out the officers' mess.

For this outstanding service it is reported that the general in question was awarded a special medal and an extra cushion for his office chair. All I got out of it was—but that's rather a painful memory. This will give you a perfectly correct idea that I never did become a perfect soldier with a lot of corpses to my credit, but I did look lovely in my uniform, and after all that is about all that can be said of some of our generals, isn't it?

Doubtless, if I had been given the opportunity to exercise my somewhat peculiar talents, I could have risen to the top and ended the war in less than no time, but it was impressed upon me very firmly by the Sergeant-Major, that in the army one was not supposed to think. The officers, who had access to more powerful inspiration, were supposed to do that for us. Some of us wondered with what they did their thinking, but that, of course, was never explained. It was probably a "military secret", carefully hidden from the vulgar gaze of the common herd—of which I was one.

Eventually the war petered out. It never did really end, and hasn't ended yet, but the outward and visible signs of it

dissolved into the atmosphere for the time being. Anyway—due doubtless to my valuable assistance—the Kaiser was defeated and deported.

This is the story of the first Act of the World War as far as I was concerned. There are other stories more glamorous that you can read. Though I have not dwelt on the glory of war, neither have I written of its beastliness or idiocy, and the miseries it brought to both victors and vanquished. Since then we have had the second Act, and it looks as if the curtain might rise on the third and final Act. I think now it's time I got back to where I belong.

Spasm Thirteen

MY FIRST SPEECH—THE OCCASION

But where do I belong? Things had somehow changed, and whether we really had saved the country or not, it didn't seem to be the same country we were told so effusively that we had rescued.

By the same token we weren't quite the same. We had gone through things and they had left their mark.

It wasn't altogether the nastiness of war, though that alone would have done something to us that would have made it impossible for us to come back quite as we were, but also we had seen other countries and met and liked other peoples, and our vision had broadened, and our souls had hardened. Though we had gained knowledge and experience, I think perhaps we had lost something that was infinitely more precious than the searing experience of bloodshed could teach us.

But the change wasn't just in us. Canada, at least western Canada, had changed. We had come back with the idea of starting in where we had left off, and carrying on from there. Unfortunately, the place we had left off wasn't there any more. We were in a new Canada, and we didn't know our way around, and we didn't know whether we liked it or not.

Being just ordinary run-of-the-orchard fellows we didn't

attempt to diagnose the change. We knew it was there. It was the atmosphere, and it made us vaguely uneasy. Later on we were to know all about it and suffer accordingly, but at first the only sensation we had was that we just didn't belong.

Perhaps the change was inevitable, and perhaps it was necessary, but the new, and I think, harsher spirit that had crept in, though doubtless tending to that much overrated thing called efficiency, wasn't quite as comfortable and kindly as the old.

The old happy-go-lucky, free and easy good-will was missing, and a harder and more rigid way of life had taken its place.

Business with a capital B had taken possession. That mysterious thing called "Money", which we had only considered in the past as something to throw around and to get what we wanted, had suddenly become the be-all and end-all of existence. It had, too, become an actual commodity to be dealt in, and vast institutions and important people were kept busy manipulating its ebb and flow. It had almost become an object of worship. It had, so to speak, taken possession. It seemed somehow to have suddenly dominated and dwarfed our lives and thoughts to the exclusion of everything that in the old days had made life worth living. Perhaps there was more purpose in life in this change, but the purpose was not as healthy or clean as the old seemingly purposeless days when we actually enjoyed living.

Now we were "Financed" and the words "Collateral, Percentage, and Securities" had entered our vocabulary and rendered our lives efficient—and miserable.

And then, too, Governments had begun to make themselves a nuisance. In the past they had contented them-

selves mostly in keeping themselves in office and passing a few thousand useless but harmless laws that we all obeyed—more or less—but to which few paid much attention. But they suddenly became very much concerned over our welfare.

In the past we had been left alone to a great extent to run our own lives, and hadn't made a bad job of it, and the government hadn't bothered with us except at election times, but now they had all of a sudden realized what helpless sheep we were, and figured it was about time to use their shepherd's crooks (no invidious suggestion intended here). In consequence we had become protected. We were protected against everybody and everything, but especially against ourselves. As a result we had become so protected from each other that we had become suspicious and distrustful of everybody with whom we had dealings, and were scared to do anything for fear we were breaking some law that we'd never even heard of.

No, in this New West we just didn't belong. It left us bewildered, and it took us a long time to orient ourselves to the conditions of this New Order that was so different from the New Order that we had been promised, and of which we had dreamed. Some of us have not yet fitted ourselves into the mould.

But before I go on to tell you of my life under this New Order, I must tell you of my first public speech. I have been under the painful necessity (all the pain was not mine alone) of making a whole raft of speeches since then, and all of them have been—in my opinion—marvels of oratory, but this first speech is the one of which I am proudest.

I really don't know just why anybody should be proud

of having made a speech. Just think of the millions and millions of speeches that have been made down through the aeons, and then look at the mess we're in today. I don't mean to insinuate that the speeches are the direct cause of the mess, but they haven't helped much, have they?

Almost anybody can make a speech, and almost everybody does—including a host of nobodies. It takes a really brave, strong, self-controlled person *not* to make a speech.

The man who, having reached the age of, say, seventy, who can boast that he never made a speech is entitled to a statue. But then he couldn't make the boast without making a speech so that's out.

Anyway, I fell from grace on this occasion, and my only excuse is that I was forced into the position by a lieutenant who, having braved all the horrors of war, was too cowardly to face a few hundred of his fellow-citizens and expose his mentality to the vulgar gaze, and, by force of habit perhaps, shoved the responsibility on to the nearest corporal.

Here's how it all happened:—

On my return to the West I had landed at a little town named Youngstown—in Alberta, of course. The reason I came to Youngstown was that my wife and family were there. That doesn't seem much of a reason these days, but we were a bit old-fashioned in 1919.

Youngstown was a small but very lively town in those days. It was the centre of a large grain-growing area, and just then was humming with activity, and right up-to-date.

Besides the farming population, who, of course, didn't count for much, being merely "the backbone of the country", there were some really important people there. There were two or three Bankers (I am giving them in the order of their customary importance), a couple of lawyers, some

mortgage company agents, several real estate agents, a couple of doctors, and four clergymen. So you see, Youngstown was a real town. They had a mayor and council, and were talking seriously of forming a Board of Trade. I never quite understood just what a Board of Trade does, but it appears that unless you have one you just aren't.

Besides the above list of "personages" there were the usual general merchants, etc., and a couple of drug stores, where you could possibly, in an emergency, actually get medicine—if the druggist wasn't too busy selling soaps or lip-stick. There were also a couple of hotels and some bootleggers. (Maybe I should have put these latter gentlemen first.) In fact, Youngstown was almost as important as it thought it was.

Among the thousands who had returned from "the job" of "making Canada safe for Democracy" were a couple of dozen "heroes" who had drifted back to Youngstown, and the Mayor and Council decided that it would be appropriate, and according to the best traditions, to hold a "Welcome Home" day for us.

Accordingly it was arranged, and we were informed that on a certain day we were supposed to meet and, accompanied by a band (I could spend a whole spasm on that band), march down the Main Street of the town and out to the Exhibition Grounds, where we were to line up in front of the Judges' stand and listen to some marvellous speeches (at least everybody thought they were marvellous until they heard mine) delivered by the Mayor and other dignitaries. This was to be followed by a banquet.

The great day came, and according to schedule we assembled at a certain place, not too far from the hotel, and, headed by the band, started to "march" down the Main

Street. It was then that our difficulties started.

Either we, with all our training, had forgotten how to march to music, or the band had never acquired the art of playing march music. As the latter, according to the leader of the band, was unthinkable, I suppose we—or the hotel-keeper, who was a very patriotic man,—were to blame.

Anyway, we spent most of the time down Main Street trying to keep in step with the band, and the band trying their best to keep in step with us. Neither succeeded, and the result was a delightful shuffle that only an experienced bootlegger could thoroughly appreciate.

Eventually we arrived at the Exhibition Grounds, where we found a crowd of several hundred people awaiting us, as we lined up according to plan.

We were horrified to find that, not only was the Mayor on the platform, but he was surrounded by four rather grim-looking members of the clergy. This, remembering the "church parades" we had endured, we felt to be a bit of an imposition, but there was nothing we could do about it. "Ours not to reason why. Ours but to stand and sweat." That's not good poetry but it's painfully true.

The Mayor began it. I have a sneaking feeling that this was HIS first speech, too. But he did a good job considering. He told us what heroes we were. We already knew this, but it was nice to have our opinion confirmed officially.

He told us how proud Canada, and especially Youngstown was of us, and what Canada was going to do for—or to—us (the dear man didn't know the half of it!), and how Canada, and especially Youngstown, was looking to US to straighten things out and inaugurate the New Order. He was somewhat indefinite about what the New Order was supposed to be, and not knowing to which political party

he belonged, we could only guess. I think he favoured higher tariff walls, stricter immigration laws—now that we were back—and bigger beer glasses. And then the clergy started. You know what they said, or if you don't you have been shamefully neglecting your churches. Don't misunderstand me. In their unofficial capacity they were all grand fellows, but officially they were as much a pain to us as we were to them.

And then the fun started. Did I tell you that our parade was led by a lieutenant? Being only a lieutenant he was quite human. If he had been a Sergeant-Major, things would have been different, and this little episode in my life might never have been written, and the peace of the world might have been delayed—at least as far as Youngstown was concerned.

The next in command was Corporal James. Before my discharge I had managed to wangle back the two stripes of which I was so proud. The edges were a little bit frayed on account of the number of times I had to stitch and un-stitch them, but otherwise they were practically new.

I had been congratulating myself on the re-acquirement of this badge of distinction, but before the day was over I was wishing I was back in the potato-peeling category. The Mayor, after eulogizing the previous speakers (I have heard that since a thousand times in House debates), called on Lieutenant Bannerman to reply.

The silly chump should have known this was coming, but seemed completely flabbergasted. He had, quite naturally, seeing it was the first time he'd had the chance, been throwing his weight around quite a bit, but on hearing this, he practically collapsed. Having some qualities that the rest of us didn't possess, he had risen (or been hoisted) to

the rank of lieutenant, but speech-making was not one of his outstanding achievements. When he was called upon to ascend the rostrum, or in other words, climb on to the platform, he simply wilted, and it took a corporal and two privates to assist him up the steps. After removing his cap, and suddenly remembering he was in uniform, sticking it back on again over his left ear, he stammered out the following fatuous remarks:—

“Mr. Mayor, while I can assure you I am full of-er-” (I was scared he was going to tell the truth there) “appreciation of the honour of being asked to speak on behalf of our returned men, I feel that, in my present condition,—I mean my present limited capacity, or rather I should say that I feel so overwhelmed by the hospitality already shown me by this great city of Youngstown, that I feel utterly incapable of doing full justice to the task, and therefore am calling on Corporal James to express to you our deep and overflowing gratitude and appreciation for your generous welcome to us on our return to this wonderful country flowing with—er—milk and honey.”

To say that I was scared would be a gross understatement. I was paralyzed. I had many fine qualities that so far the public and the military authorities had failed to recognize, but even I had never considered speech-making as one of them. However, my lieutenant, being my superior (in point of rank only) officer, had ordered me to “Carry on”, and just as in my potato-peeling days, I felt I had to rise to the occasion and obey orders. I had forgotten for the time that I could have passed the buck to a private. I hadn’t been in politics then so hadn’t got the “buck-passing” game down to any extent.

And so I too crawled up the steps and faced my first

audience. Since then, having been a Member of the Alberta Legislature for eleven years, I have been forced to make hundreds of speeches, each of which, if they had been fully appreciated, would have ranked with those of Demosthenes, but I'm prouder of that first speech than of any of my finer efforts.

Just think of it! This was my FIRST speech, thrust on me at a moment's notice by a cowardly lieutenant who, when called to civic duty, shirked his responsibility and left it to a potato-peeling corporal.

After all that may be the way most of our wars have been won. I have always thought that (outside of sergeant-majors) the non-commissioned officers (especially corporals) were the real brains of the army. Napoleon Bonaparte was a corporal, wasn't he?

But to get on to my speech:—

Spasm Fourteen

MY FIRST SPEECH—THE SPEECH

And this is how it started:—

"Mr. Mayor, distinguished Members of the Episcopacy, Ladies and Gentlemen. . . ." I was rather proud of that word "episcopacy". I wasn't quite sure what it meant, but it sounded kind of churchified anyway. I think it rather startled the four clergymen. In fact the Baptist minister looked positively alarmed. I think he had an idea that I was accusing him of something that was distinctly—from a theological point of view—unorthodox, or something.

Anyway, it was a good beginning in that it gave the clergy somewhat of an inferiority complex, something that is often difficult to do.

I rather spoilt the effect by getting my tongue twisted over the word a bit so that it didn't come out just right, but as most of my audience didn't know just how it should have sounded, it didn't matter much, and anyway, it had the desired effect, which was, as it is in most speeches, to impress my audience with the fact that I was complete master of the English language, and that I could treat even the most unusual words with a kind of contemptuous familiarity. The speech continued:—

"Having spent the last four years dodging—among a few other trifles such as bullets and shrapnel—church parades,

I find myself in a rather embarrassing position, cooped up on a small platform, surrounded by four of the gentlemen I have so studiously avoided for such a long time. Which all goes to prove something or other about retribution, or something about 'be sure your sins will find you out.' Well, ladies and gentlemen, if my sins haven't found me out, the clergy certainly have. If there is any connection between my sins and the clergy I will leave it to you to diagnose. I've got a bit muddled about it myself.

"But, though being asked to make a speech today has come as a complete surprise, I am not going to pretend that the situation has embarrassed me in the slightest degree. It is true that I was absolutely unprepared to address such a distinguished audience, but on the other hand, you were equally unprepared for the delightful experience of having to listen to someone who has never made a speech before, and who hasn't the faintest idea of what he is going to say next. So we're all in the same fix. The only difference being that you have the privilege of walking off just when you want to, and I'm stuck up here and have to carry on to the bitter end. There is a moral in that somewhere if I could just remember what it is.

"First of all I want to thank Lieutenant Bannerman for shirking his obvious duty and passing his responsibility on to me. All my life it has been one of my strongest ambitions to make a public speech. I have realized for a long time, that once you have acquired the art of making speeches, you never have to actually DO anything. You just go around making speeches telling other people what to do and how to do it, and then you can lounge around watching them work. That, to my mind, is the ideal life. The man or woman who can live in 'an advisory capacity'

has achieved success and can therefore rest from his labours and just make speeches.

"And so today I have been given the privilege of starting on a new career. Also I feel it a privilege to have the opportunity to make my first speech to such a distinguished audience as I see before me here.

"You mustn't take that last remark too seriously. It is something that one just has to say anyway.

"Though you may feel somewhat aggrieved at being made the victims of this first experiment, yet I feel that you may live to realize that you have been granted the privilege of listening to the first speech of a man who may some day be known as Canada's greatest orator!

"You will have realized by this time that all I have said so far has been sheer nonsense, but after all most speeches are sheer nonsense anyway, aren't they?

"But now, having got rid of the necessary fooling with which one is supposed to start a speech, let's get down to business.

"We are back home again. We are HOME, and to us that means something that cannot be expressed in words. We have been away for four or five years in countries and among people whose ways and ideals are different to ours. We have seen, yes, and done things that we want to forget. We have, deep down in our hearts, a hope and prayer that such horrors as those in which we have participated may never again be perpetrated in this so-called civilized world. We are home among familiar faces and amid our own people, and we thank God for that, and want to forget as soon as possible the beastliness of war.

"While we have been away we have been told of the wonderful things that this war 'to end all wars' was to bring

us, and what a wonderful place this Canada that we had 'saved for democracy' was to become, and how the leaders were planning to make Canada a land 'fit for heroes to live in', and though we have seen little evidence of that yet, we're still hoping that these promises will be kept, and are looking forward to a life in this great country of ours where the ugly head of poverty and fear may never show itself.

"The Mayor has told us that the people of Canada are looking to us to straighten things out and start the 'New Order' in Canada. Candidly, friends, we wish you wouldn't do that. To begin with, we're a bit tired, and perhaps a bit disillusioned, and don't feel quite up to the job. And then, to be frank with you, we were hoping that YOU would do something about that while we were away.

"Speaking, I know, for my comrades, I want to assure you that we are neither looking for any special privileges as returned soldiers, nor looking for special responsibilities as the saviours of the country. All we want is to share with you the ordinary duties and ordinary blessings of living in a country as rich and free as Canada can be if together we use our intelligence. We're not heroes to be set apart even if that meant receiving special treatment. We're just ordinary every-day people, and that's how we want to be looked upon. We want to take off our uniforms and be absorbed among our own people, and take up our jobs, whatever they may be, with you. There is big work to be done and none of us can do it alone. It's got to be done together.

"Over there in Europe we fought to destroy a disease known as Kaiserism. Maybe we didn't succeed altogether, but we did at least scotch the Kaiser. Here in Canada there are some distinct traces of the same disease appearing and

we're hoping that we, not as warriors, but as good citizens together with you, our fellow-citizens, can work to wipe out this disease before it becomes too chronic.

"We can none of us resume life just where we left off, but we can make at least a fresh start and see what we can make of this country of ours.

"On behalf of my comrades—including even the lieutenant who palmed this job on to me—I want to thank you for the welcome you have so kindly given us, and to apologise for inflicting this long speech on you.

"I know that you were thinking—and hoping—that I would mumble a few embarrassed words and sit down, instead of which I have rambled on as if I was a padre on church parade.

"This was an ill return for your kindness, but I felt that I might never have another opportunity to make a speech, so I had to make the most of it.

"And now we can all relax and enjoy ourselves."

Here ended my first speech. Better speeches have been made. I understand that Abraham Lincoln made one at Gettysburg that was at least its equal, but this was my first, so I thought it was worthy of record.

I was fated to make another before the day was out,—that was late in the evening,—and my memory of what happened that evening is a bit confused, so I won't try to repeat it.

If I had foreseen the results later on of that speech, I might never have made it, and possibly the world, or at least our portion of it, might have been saved a lot of unnecessary pain.

Though I was not to realize it for some years to come, I think that speech, together with a combination of other

circumstances, was to land me in a kind of life of which I had never dreamed; the life upon which I am now (for my sins) engaged. If it has not made me completely stodgy, it is because a kindly fate so constituted me that such a transformation was impossible.

But that was to be in the future. Meanwhile, we carried on under the benevolent eye, and the drippingly paternal care of a grateful government.

Spasm Fifteen

MY FIRST SPEECH—THE CONSEQUENCES

Although that speech was really rather a futile and inconsequential one, and didn't mean any more than the speeches one hears over the radio these days, it eventually did something to me that, a few years later, was to change the whole course of my life.

I don't think I had any illusions that I was a modern Demosthenes or anything of that kind, but the thought that, caught unawares, and under the most unfavourable circumstances possible, I had made a speech before a large and rather cynical audience without stammering or stuttering, did something to my subconscious self (whatever that is) that was rather devastating. The fact that the speech meant little or nothing didn't seem to matter much, but the fact that I had proved I could do something that I had never dreamed of doing, and had been firmly convinced that I never could do, meant a whole lot. It awakened in me something that had never seemed to be there, but had possibly been lying dormant waiting to be roused. Undoubtedly learned psychologists could explain it—to their own satisfaction at least—but I couldn't, and don't intend to try.

Hitherto I had looked on myself as a sort of fellow with whom it was fairly easy to get along, but whose influence on the life of the nation was a little less than nil. That I;

or other ordinary people, had anything to do with the way the country was run never entered my head. It was all too intricate and complex for common people. It was a matter for "experts".

We had always been impressed with the carefully planted idea that economics and politics were only for a superior type of being with massive brains and super-intelligence, and so had been content to listen to campaign speeches on "the Tariff", and elect a "representative" every so often, and fondly believed that these representatives actually had something to do with running the affairs of the country for us. The only criticism we felt capable of offering was always directed at the political party for which we had not voted. It was more or less of a game to most of us—and perhaps to the representatives too.

But from this time on there was a very gradual change in my outlook on life. I hadn't become overnight one of the painfully grown-ups, in fact I haven't yet, and am beginning to hope, now that my chances are good, of never being so afflicted, but I began to have an uneasy feeling that something was radically wrong with the whole set-up, and that we, the ordinary folk, were somehow to blame.

It was some years after this that this unpleasant feeling was to get to the stage when I began to think that I should, or even could do anything about it, and a few years more before I actually got into action.

But meanwhile, our life was changed in another way. We solemnly decided to "settle down" in earnest.

We didn't know then how very far down we were fated to be settled or we never would have done it, and perhaps this autobiography would never have been written.

We had sort of skimmed through life in a happy way, doing crazy things when we felt like it—which was quite often—getting into and out of all kinds of “jams”, and being none the worse off; and generally managing to come up smiling—though sometimes the smile was a rather rueful and shamefaced grin.

For instance, there was the time when I went to England to settle and left my family back in Alberta until I could send for them. I kept writing back reports of my doings and intentions. One day I would write that everything was fine and I had my eye on an ideal place in Devonshire or somewhere. In about a week or two I would write that I just couldn't stick it and was coming back. This went on for some time, and my wife got “fed up”.

At last, I really found a place I thought we could live in, and even went to the length of buying a nice tractable donkey for my young daughter to ride.

I wrote this joyful news home, and then suddenly decided that I couldn't possibly stick it any longer, sold the donkey, and bought my passage back to Canada, to surprise my family.

Unfortunately, my wife also decided that she wasn't going to stick it any longer, and arranged to cross the ocean and “surprise” me by a sudden appearance in England. The surprise was complete on both sides; we passed each other on the ocean! My wife arrived in England to find I had left for Canada, and I arrived in Canada to find she had left for England.

And so I had to wait in Montreal until she could get passage home, and by the time she arrived in Montreal we were both broke. To be broke in Montreal is not what you might call a pleasant experience for strangers, but some-

how we managed to get a kick out of it. By pooling our resources, and pawning some non-essential excess baggage, we managed to pay our room rent and eat—occasionally—so why worry?

Fortunately, I ran into a man who was leaving on a large construction job in Northern Ontario. He offered to take us there and get me a job as construction foreman. What I didn't know about construction was colossal, but that did not deter me from accepting the offer, and we went gayly forward to meet what fate had in store for us.

This was, as usual, a mixture, but the hardships of the more or less frozen north were trivial compared to the glories of the new experiences and the companionship of men and (a few) women who were natural born "pioneers".

It was during this period that I had my first encounter with Italian cheese. I had in my gang a number of gay and light-hearted Italians with whom it was a real delight to work. They were a friendly bunch, and though they had a few quarrels among themselves in which wicked-looking knives sometimes were flourished, there was no malice in them.

I used sometimes to write letters for them and help them in other small ways, and, when they were leaving, one of them came to the shack bearing gifts.

The gifts consisted of a large jug of Italian wine and an Italian cheese. Unfortunately, he decided to spend the evening with us. The shack consisted of one room, so the cheese had to remain on the table as long as he stayed. It was a warm evening, and though we had the door and window (there was just one) open, the cheese soon made its presence felt, and before long permeated the atmosphere for miles around. He was such a pleasant fellow, and was

so obviously pleased with himself for his thoughtfulness in bringing us the treasure, we hadn't the heart even to hint the lateness of the hour, so we just sat and sat, and endured with a stiff, unnatural smile on our faces, while he told us what wonderful people we were, and how wonderful he was too.

By the time he was ready to go we both felt like cheese, looked like cheese, and for days smelt like cheese. After he had gone my wife fetched a shovel and I a wheelbarrow, and we tenderly lifted the cheese into the wheelbarrow and trundled it a long way off and buried it deep under the ground.

I am told that today the place has got quite a reputation as a health resort. People say there is a strange invigorating tang to the air that is supposed to be a cure for housemaids' knee, or something.

But the experience of four or five years in Northern Ontario would take a whole book in itself to relate, and would interrupt the line of thought that is supposed to run like a golden thread through this book, so perhaps some day I'll write (at so much per word) another book, "My Life in the Frozen North", and unless the censor bans it as being too decent and healthy, it may be worth reading.

If I had been an experienced writer I would have fitted these episodes in somewhere where they really belong, and would not mix up the incidents so much. I just scrawl them out as I think of them, and the reader has to take them as they come.

But I guess I'd better get back to Alberta and our life after the first Act of the World War, before I completely lose my place.

I have told you how we decided to settle down. The

tragedy of it was that we settled down in the wrong place, the wrong time and the wrong job. The result was we settled down so deep that we were nearly buried before our time (though there are people who declare that that would be impossible), and it took more effort to get back to the surface than either of us enjoyed.

As the spot we happened to be in was supposed to be a farming district, we decided, with the aid of the Soldier Settlement Board, to start farming.

We knew something about cattle and horse ranching, and more than a little about cows and horses, but this "dirt" farming" was something new to us. On a dirt farm, it appeared that raising stock was only indulged in as a side line, and was attended to in spare moments between ten at night and four in the morning. The main work was in growing—or attempting to grow—crops.

Chickens and pigs and things like that were incidentals that went with the main work, and most farmers not only kept a few cows, but actually milked them.

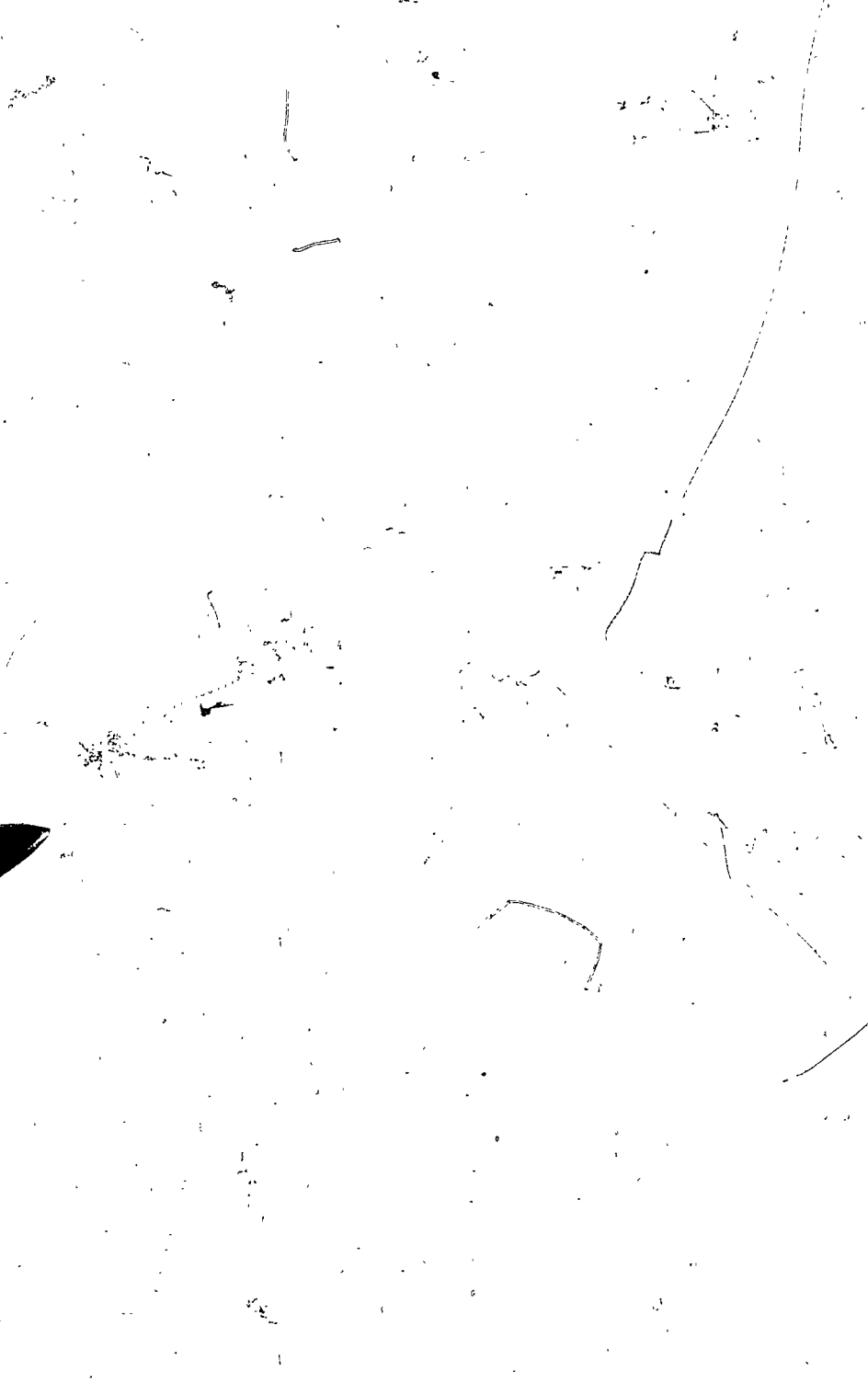
I had seen—in the distance—men sitting in apparent comfort behind a gang plough dozing down long stretches of fields and turning over nice even furrows without apparent effort, or sitting on a seat at the back of a binder that cut and tied the grain in bundles. It looked as if either the horses or the machine did all the work while the man just went along to supervise. I felt that at last I had found something for which I was eminently suited. If I could spend the rest of my life sitting down and supervising, I would have attained my highest ambition. My wife, too, felt that she could easily learn just to dote on chickens and pigs, and could almost make family pets of the latter.

But we soon found that things weren't exactly as they

were depicted on the implement folders and the seed catalogues.

To begin with, the farm that the Soldier Settlement Board inspected and pronounced satisfactory turned out not to be a dirt farm at all. It was a quarry that someone had neglected to quarry. The dirt was so well hidden with rocks that we never really got down to the actual farm. I feel sure that it was there because the former owner, who appeared to be an honest man, assured me that it was, and that once I had cleared the surface stones the rest would be plain sailing. It was. Whenever I mounted the gang plough I sailed, and I still have the scars on the parts of my anatomy that lit first.

However, I did accumulate some magnificent rock piles. If you're ever in that country, you can see them for miles. Some day I'm going to go back there and raise a monument with them to the Soldier Settlement Board of that era!



Spasm Sixteen

FARMING ON A ROCK PILE

I don't know to this day what strange kink in my mentality made me want to tackle this "dirt farming" game. Possibly it was the idea that it would be fun to try something that I'd never tackled before, but I really think that it was a hazy (really the word is crazy) idea that a farmer's life was one of peace and tranquility, and, after the turmoil and unrest of the war years, that appealed to me. After the experience of peace (?) years I am beginning to have a longing for the peace and tranquillity of the war years again.

If I had known all the grisly details of a farmer's life I would have tried the comparatively safe and easy life of a lion tamer or trapeze artist instead.

Of course, I should have known better, but then, whatever I have done, I have always found out later that I should have known better, and I often wonder why I persist in doing things that I know beforehand will make me realize later that I should have known better.

Maybe it's the doing of things that I ought to have known better than to do that has made life so worth while. Anyway, if the getting into muddles is somewhat unpleasant, the fun of getting out of them always makes up for it, and the knowledge that there's always more to come is

better than the deadly monotony of the knowledge that you will always do the right thing.

As usual, we had the idea that this particular venture would prove to be the means by which we could accumulate a modest fortune. We had long since given up any idea of becoming millionaires. Having studied some income tax figures we had realized the futility of that kind of thing.

This particular district, had, during a few freak years of abnormal rains, raised marvellous wheat crops, and we figured (on paper) that with 360 acres of land sown to wheat and raising 50 bushels to the acre at \$2.00 a bushel, we could retire and go into politics.

The land was really a hidden asset (hidden by the rocks) but we had faith that it was there and would, in due time, become more apparent.

It didn't work out that way. It never does, and deep down in our minds we knew it wouldn't but it was fun to try anyway.

To begin with, just because we had arrived on the scene, this particular section of country decided to go "dry" (this by the way had nothing to do with prohibition), and it just couldn't rain when it should, and it just couldn't stop when it started, which was always when it couldn't do any good, and just in time to ruin what little crop we had.

Then again, I found that there just weren't enough spots of earth peeping up between the boulders to make it worth while, and that, in spite of the optimistic prophecies of the former owner, the more rocks I carted away, the more arrived from down below somewhere.

But the chief obstacle to my tranquillity was the implements. I don't quite know what they were supposed to

implement, unless it was everything that was sulphuric and brimstonic in one's disposition.

With their nice red and green paint they looked so harmless, artistic and inviting, but once you mounted the devilish devices you soon found that riding a bucking bronco was just child's play in comparison.

I shall never forget my first attempts to put together a complicated horror called a binder. I don't know why it was called a binder. I know that it disintegrated everything in my anatomy whenever I rode the blinking contraption.

I bought it "knocked down", which meant that it came in pieces (about ten thousand of them) that I was supposed to put together. I have worked in moments of aberration on jigsaw puzzles, but the inventor of jigsaw puzzles didn't half know his business. He should have started with the "pieces" of a binder and he'd have had everybody crazy.

I did eventually get the thing together, but the way I did it was evidently not the way the misguided inventor of the diabolical thing meant it to go. At the end I came to the conclusion that either the inventor didn't know his business, or that I was not exactly a mechanical genius. I have regretfully come to the conclusion that the latter was probably somewhere near the truth.

Fortunately, I didn't have to use the thing much. That was about the time the country—probably to spite me—decided to go dry again, and the wheat refused to grow above the rocks sufficiently to be cut.

Unfortunately, this was before the time when a beneficent government decided to pay farmers for not growing wheat. If it had not been, I could possibly have made a fortune, because the amount of wheat I did NOT grow was something fabulous.

The only year I really did grow a good crop an obliging hail storm came along at the right time and saved me the trouble of cutting it.

But of all the so-called implements with which I had to wrestle, the gang-plough was the worst. I think it was called a gang-plough because every time I mounted the fiendish thing, it and the boulders ganged up on me and tried to bury me in the furrow.

By the way, I remember once, in my wanderings up and down the field, I composed a poem about this instrument of torture. Here it is, as well as I can remember it:—

“Seated one day on the gang-plough, I was weary
and ill at ease.

My horses wandered forward, in response to my
earnest pleas.

I know not what I was thinking, or what I was
dreaming—when

I struck one great big boulder, that felt like the
great Amen.

I shot from my seat like a rocket, I lit 'mid the
horses' feet,

I jarred every bone from its socket and tore all the
pants from my seat.

I lay there a moment wondering, if all of my bones
were sound,

Then I rose and went on ploughing, for—it hap-
pened on every round.”

I do not take full credit for this masterpiece. I believe a man named Sir Arthur Sullivan wrote something faintly resembling it. I merely changed the words a little.

I wrote several other odes to the various implements

with which I was afflicted, but in spite of the popularity of certain "best-sellers" I still think they were a shade too lurid to present to the kind of readers I hope will peruse this book.

Nowadays, of course, all the kinds of machinery I used then, plus the haywire and binder twine with which I used to mend them, have departed. I know where they have gone, but their destination is never mentioned in polite society. Maybe I shall meet them again some day.

When I see the up-to-date farmers of these later days in which civilization is supposed to have reached its peak, gliding along on nice rubber-tyred tractors hauling along the super-machines that plough, harrow, seed and cut the crop almost in one operation, I'm almost inclined to envy them, but when I look at their faces, I begin to wonder.

That's what's so puzzling about this civilization and modern up-to-date way of life. All the wonderful accomplishments of our inventive geniuses that are supposed to lift the burden of life from our shoulders don't seem to have had any effect. In fact, judging by the look on most people's faces, and seeing the worried, harried, frustrated expressions that they wear, and the beaten stoop to their shoulders, all these marvellous accomplishments of science and civilization don't seem to have added one iota to the happiness of the human race, but rather to have weighed us down with woes that were unknown in the good old days of ignorance and simplicity.

It makes one hope that civilization really has reached its peak. If it goes any higher, goodness knows where we'll land.

Besides the weather and the rocks, there were two reasons why I never became a successful farmer. I was one,

and the Soldier Settlement Board was the other. The general consensus of opinion of those who were supposed to know was that I wasn't really a farmer at all. Either I lacked certain essentials that go to make up a farmer, or I possessed certain undesirable qualities that put farming far above my mental capacity to absorb.

To begin with it appears that I didn't have any methods, and those I acquired were all wrong anyway.

I just couldn't settle down to routine, and insisted on farming more by inspiration than by rule. When I felt inspired I would farm harder than any of them, and when the inspiration wouldn't come, well, I just didn't farm.

The inspiration was so spasmodic that it made good farming impossible. It was like the rain; it never came at the right time. Sometimes I would be inspired to start seeding, only to find that my timing was all wrong and that I should have been summer-fallowing, or something.

One rather nasty minded old man suggested that if I would put less confidence in inspiration and more in perspiration I might have better success, but as he had a sour-looking face and ulcers on his stomach, I didn't think his example was a good one to follow. He seemed to be a fanatic about perspiration, and once he had acquired it, just hated to get rid of it. The result wasn't pleasant for the people around him. The advertisements have a name for it now, but we won't go into that.

Anyway, shortly after that some mortgage company got his land, and the ulcers got him, so his arguments were unconvincing. And then, too, I got a notion that a farmer should keep books so that he could at all times tell whether he was making a fortune or going bankrupt. This was a

mistake. No farmer should keep books. If he does, he won't farm.

The second obstacle to my success was the Soldier Settlement Board. This Board was set up by a more or less benevolent government to take care of the heroes who had saved the country. These heroes were quite a problem, and it was thought advisable to get them scattered as far apart as possible and thus render them harmless to future administrations. Some of them had begun to think and ask awkward questions about the Canada that was supposed to be made fit for heroes, and that was a dangerous habit to get started. Widely scattered farms seemed to be the solution. They "settle" the soldier, and the country could again be saved for democracy — or something. Since then they have succeeded in settling some of them into their graves, and a lot more into mental hospitals, and the government has been enabled to repossess the farms and sell them again to alien enemies — which is, of course, good business, though it may be bad ethics.

Anyway, this S.S.B. bought the land from favoured proprietors at about three times its value and stuck us on it, made us pay top prices for stock and equipment, and told us to go ahead and make our fortunes.

They not only gave us the land — at a price — but equipped it for us — also at a price — and as long as we paid so much per annum, plus interest, they didn't bother us — much. Eventually, if we kept the payments up plus interest, we were told that we could get the title deeds and become landed proprietors and capitalists, which, in these enlightened days, would outlaw us from decent bolshevik society.

They did succeed in convincing us that Canada had become a country for heroes.

They not only selected our rockpiles for us, but even provided "Supervisors" to come around periodically to show us how to farm. This would have been an excellent arrangement but for one thing. It was possibly more bad luck than bad management that they happened to pick supervisors who knew somewhat less about farming than we did; and what most of us knew about farming was rather less than nothing.

I must confess, though, that the visits of these genial gentlemen did help to relieve the monotony and drudgery of farm life considerably.

They were all splendid fellows, and would breeze in every now and then, put their horses in the stable, share our meals, sleep in our beds, and regale us with stories of the war for hours on end. I remember some of the stories now, and the only reason I don't blush is because I have lost the art. I'm not going to repeat them. Even in these days there are some people who are a little finicky about such things, and I hope my readers are among them. Anyway, you can find more "off-colour" ones in the "best sellers" that seem so popular.

We discussed the political and social life of the nation, and almost every other topic we could think of, and the only subject that seemed to be "taboo" was — farming.

The most delightful thing about these supervisors was that they never attempted to supervise. If they had, and we had listened to their advice, there would have been some queer farming done. But if they failed in supervising they shone as morale builders, and we always felt more like human beings after their visits.

This was in the early stages of the S.S.B. Later on, these friendly and intelligent supervisors gradually disappeared and gave place to a very different breed. These, also, knew nothing of farming, but were experts in their line. Their line was collecting, and in snooping and badgering they could almost rival the income tax collector of these days.

One of the sweetest memories of those days is the thought of the time when I had the joy of booting one of them off the place.

Shortly after that, the S.S.B, regretfully informed me that my presence on the rock pile was no longer necessary as they were taking over.

And so ended my first experience in "dirt farming." Though from an agricultural or financial point of view it wasn't exactly a success, still it had its moments, and though the neighbours were a bit different from those we had encountered in our more irresponsible days, they were a friendly and sociable lot, and we were richer for knowing them.

The S.S.B. still owns the farm, and from all I've heard, they have made a worse mess of it than I did.

Spasm Seventeen

BEGINNING WITH FUNERALS

It was about this time that I became faintly interested in politics. Alberta was distinctly a farmers' province and the farmers had got rather tired of being called "the backbone of the country" and getting about the same treatment that most backbones get—lots of work and very little meat—and had decided to form a Party of their own and go into politics. This was considered very shocking by the two Old Line Parties, and the ruin of the whole country was freely predicted if this horrible idea took root. It *was* shocking, and when election day came, the Old Line Parties got the shock of their lives and found themselves out in the cold.

Being by this time an "expert farmer" I naturally was supposed to support this farm movement, and in a kind of half-hearted and bewildered way, I did.

By the way, I had better explain my statement that I had become an expert farmer. An "expert farmer" is a man who knows so much about farming that he really has no time to farm. He's too busy explaining to other farmers the correct way to farm ever to really indulge in actual farming operations. He's something like the old maid or social worker, who goes around teaching mothers how to raise their children:

If he becomes a *very* "expert farmer" he eventually gets

a job as a District Agriculturist with some government, or if he is bombastic enough, might become a Professor and spend the rest of his life extolling the merits of artificial fertilizers.

I wasn't THAT expert. In fact I really only got as far in the art as to be able (through experience) to tell people how NOT to farm. Still that went a long way, and I soon acquired quite a reputation. You can, by the way, do the same thing in almost any walk of life, and if you're smooth enough, and give yourself enough publicity, you can get away with it.

But to get back to my little splurge in politics: The Farmer Government did very well for a time, and passed legislation that was supposed to be of wonderful benefit to the farmers. It was perhaps not their fault that the benefits never seemed to reach down as far as the farms, but somehow got sidetracked half way down the line. Still they did their best and for a time jogged along in a very satisfactory manner.

Unfortunately, after a few years, they suffered the fate of a lot of other reform Parties. They themselves became an Old Line Party and eventually became more reactionary than their predecessors.

But the movement really had quite a good effect. It roused the farming people to a keen interest in the "whys" of economic conditions, and the result, as far as Alberta is concerned, has been an intelligent interest in political and social problems that has put the province far out ahead of the rest of Canada in progressive thought and action. The farmers even succeeded in sending a substantial group of representatives to the Federal Parliament in Ottawa,

where they were able for a time to make themselves thoroughly obnoxious to the Powers-That-Be.

Eventually, of course, some of the more powerful of them were persuaded to accept remunerative posts here and there in the government of the day, and what was called the "Ginger Group" lost most of its "ginger" and became ineffective. But while it lasted it did good work, and its effect, even today, is not altogether dissipated.

But that's enough of politics just now. There'll be plenty more of a rather different kind later on.

After the Soldier Settlement Board decided, tearfully, that it would be in the public interest if we severed our connections with their collecting agency, we almost decided to throw in the sponge and let somebody else solve the agricultural problems of the country, but somehow we hated to quit the fight just because we had lost the first round, so we rented a vacant farm in the vicinity and proceeded to "show them".

It wasn't exactly a wise thing to do, but I pride myself on my strong will and determination (my wife has another name for it), so I made up my mind that we would yet "wrest from the soil" the living I fondly thought we deserved.

The best I can say for the venture is that we didn't do any worse than anybody else in that district. Perhaps that was because there just wasn't any worse. We had landed ourselves right in the middle of what was known as the "dry area", and only those who have lived there can get much of an idea of what that means.

It wasn't what is generally known as a desert. In the winter there was enough snow to grow the best crops in the world. Unfortunately, crops don't grow in the winter,

and in the spring the snow melted and ran down into the coulees, and when we had sown our grain and it begun to come up, looking lovely and green, along came the hot dry winds and mowed it down again.

This happened year after year, and how we and the other people lived through it has been somewhat of a mystery to me ever since.

I'm not going to harrow up your souls with a description of the misery and poverty I witnessed during our stay in that stricken country, or tell you of the makeshifts these people used to eke out a bare existence.

One wouldn't think under ordinary circumstances, for instance, that a flour sack could be used for anything but to hold flour, but in our land that was only their initial use. After that they became window curtains, table cloths, pillow cases and even dresses.

Then again there was the humble and rather verminous gopher. Perhaps you don't know what a gopher is, but, if you did, you would not dream of people catching and salting them down for human food, yet during these years of horror in the "dry area" I have visited more than one shack where these horrible little creatures were in barrels, well salted and waiting for the family table.

And then these "shacks" that some of our people lived in: Picture if you can this "bald-headed" prairie where the wind has full sweep for miles on end, and set down in the middle a shack composed of one layer of lumber and a coating of tar paper, and then take a look at the thermometer and see that it registers 20 to 30 degrees below zero and you'll get some idea of what life in the "dry area" was in the days of the "depression".

And then picture yourself getting up at three o'clock in

the morning, bundling up in any clothes you could pile on you, harnessing up the team, hitching them to the bob-sleighs, and starting out on a thirty mile trip for a load of coal.

At thirty below zero you wouldn't really ride in the sleigh much. Most of the time you would walk. If you didn't, you'd freeze. It was a two-day trip, and you just *had* to get back on time or the family would have to break up the few sticks of furniture for fuel.

We hear a good deal these days about the sufferings of the "starving people of Europe", and our benevolent government is rightly solicitous of their welfare, but I sometimes wonder if right here in this wealthy country of Canada we aren't a bit inclined to stress the sufferings of people in far off lands, while we conveniently shut our eyes to the suffering and heroism in our midst. Perhaps we're a bit ashamed of it, seeing it is stupidly unnecessary.

But in spite of the hardships, the bleakness and deprivations, there was something splendid in that period, and what made it so splendid was the people. The heroism, the kindness, the cheerfulness and hospitality were indescribable, and beyond any words of praise that I can think of.

Since then I have lived in more prosperous districts where plenty was the rule, but never have I experienced the open-handed and cheerful hospitality of those unsung heroes and heroines of that "dry area".

Oh, they were just ordinary people. Some were stupid, some intelligent, some honest and some tricky. Just a mixture, but somehow, whether the poverty and hardship brought out the best in them, or whether they were too dumb to be mean and greedy, I will never know. All I know

is that the memory of those neighbours of the "dry area" is one of the sweetest and most treasured in my life.

It was during this period that I developed, much against my will, a new and, to me, a rather alarming—well, I don't just know what to call it—unless the word "side-line" describes it.

It happened in this way. We were having lunch one day when two men drove up in a buggy and came in. One of them, a pleasant spoken man, introduced himself as a Mr. Walsh, and then proceeded to introduce his companion, who was a young man of about 22 or 23 years. The latter was rather shy and diffident and ~~left the talking to Mr. Walsh.~~

After some humming and hawing it appeared that the young man's father had just died and they were trying to arrange the funeral service. They lived a long way from town, they were as poor as it was possible to be and go on living.

I gathered that a neighbour had made the coffin and most of the arrangements had been completed, and bit by bit I dragged it out of them that the only difficulty was someone to conduct the funeral service. It appeared that there was no clergyman, available, as the only one within reasonable distance (about 50 miles) was away.

Even then I didn't grasp what they were after, and when I finally found out that they wanted ME to conduct the service I nearly had a fit. Of course, I refused flatly. I had been to a few funerals in my life, but hadn't really the faintest idea how they were conducted and what was necessary. The very thought of it made me break out in a cold sweat. I had done a lot of things in my life, some

creditable and more in a different category, but conducting a funeral! Horrors! NO!

But when I saw tears in the eyes of the son, heard the soft-voiced pleading of Mr. Walsh (who, by the way, could have made a much better job of it than I did), and saw the reproachful look on my wife's face I weakly gave in.

The following couple of days were a nightmare. I couldn't eat and couldn't sleep. The thought of that funeral gave me the shivers, and I envied the corpse his calm serenity.

The day arrived and Mr. Walsh came with a car to get me. All the way I was kind of hoping that he would drive in the ditch or something, but nothing could go wrong that day, and we arrived safely. That was when I got my worst shock. Instead of the "few intimate friends" that I had been told would be there, I found about two hundred farmers from all over the country, with their wives and families.

Well, somehow I got through the service at the house and then on to the cemetery for the final rites. How I got through I shall never know, but I'm confident that it added about ten years to my age.

The trouble was that, having done it once, I was expected to do it again. For some strange reason, after that when anybody died the relatives and friends seemed to take it for granted that I would have to conduct the service. I don't to this day know why that should have been. Certainly my way of doing things was very far from orthodox, and I never did acquire the "patter", if such an expression is permissible in connection with the last rites, but somehow it got to be my job, though I was always averse to performing it.

I have sometimes wondered since if the people round about, realizing that I wasn't much of a farmer, and hoping that I must be good for something, hit on this method of making me useful.

I think the most embarrassing funeral I ever conducted was that of an old lady who was rather notorious in the neighbourhood.

She had left the country for a prolonged visit to the States, and while there had died, leaving instructions that her body was to be cremated and the ashes returned to her home for me to bury.

She had many qualities that did not endear her to the authorities or the clergy. She could outswear any sailor, and possessed the most vitriolic tongue I have ever heard. In addition to this she manufactured and sold at exorbitant prices a concoction which she boastfully claimed was whiskey, but which was potent enough to start another international war if ever introduced into a peace conference. In the eyes of the strait-laced and rigidly moral portion of the population (a small minority) she was a very disreputable character indeed, but she had one virtue which perhaps made up for her many failings.

If anybody was ever in trouble she was always the first on the spot to give any help she could. Nothing was ever too much trouble; and no weather was ever bad enough to keep her away in case of sickness.

Maybe she was a wicked old woman, but she loved much, and perhaps to her much will be forgiven.

But it was rather an awkward situation for an amateur parson, wasn't it? However, the ashes were duly buried and her last wish was complied with, and her relatives and friends satisfied, so maybe it wasn't so embarrassing after all,

Unfortunately the people, having got me started on conducting funeral services, were not satisfied. They seemed to think that the natural sequence to funerals was sermons. The fact that I was not, never had been, nor ever could be, an ordained minister, seemed to them of little consequence. If I could hold funeral services, I could preach sermons, and if I could preach sermons I should hold services. I never quite got the process of reasoning they went through, but that didn't seem to make much difference. So the next step had to be to arrange Sunday services at the various school houses. I am still wondering how it all got to be that way, and I still can't see myself doing all these things, but I know it happened, because people still speak of those services.

By the way, there was one other duty with which certain people tried to saddle me, and which, thanks to the laws of the land, I was unable to undertake. Some people got the idea in their heads that, because I could bury people I was equally capable of marrying them, and several couples came to me with the request that I would perform the wedding ceremony.

Fortunately for me, according to Canadian laws, though anybody can bury anybody (provided they are dead), it takes special qualifications to be given a license to marry people.

Anyway I was spared the necessity of taking on my shoulders such an awful responsibility.

But to return to my sermonizing:—

This particular district was so poverty-stricken that they could not afford to pay even the miserable stipend allowed an ordained clergyman, and couldn't even afford to take up a collection, and yet there was an urge among them to meet together for worship of some kind.

Though my particular brand of sermons didn't follow any particular pattern, and certainly had nothing to do with any denomination, yet somehow everybody seemed to enjoy those gatherings and people came in ever increasing numbers from all denominations. Maybe it was the singing, of which I always took care to have plenty. If these services did nothing else, they brought us together with a better understanding of each other as a result.

But even today, looking back, I can't understand how such weird and unaccountable things happened to me.

Spasm Eighteen

THE MAN-MADE DEPRESSION

It was about this time that "The Great Depression" hit us. Even today, nearly twenty years later, nobody has been able to explain rationally why there was a depression, and we, who had fought in the war that was to end all wars, and make Canada a country fit for heroes in which to live, were more puzzled than anybody.

By the way, the name "depression" is an apt one. It depressed every one except the Chosen Few so deeply that we might all of us have been buried. In fact it actually did bury a lot of innocent victims.

It came overnight without any seeming rhyme or reason. One day the country was wealthy; granaries and warehouses were full to bursting; factories were going at top speed; everybody was employed and the buying power of the people was as normal as it could be under the existing financial system. The next day everything went fluey. The granaries and warehouses were still full; the store shelves were still piled high with goods, and food was as plentiful as ever. Suddenly nothing was available to anybody because the paper tickets with which we generally used to purchase things mysteriously disappeared.

Suddenly factories closed down, throwing hundreds of thousands out of work, businesses went on the rocks, unem-

ployment became the rule and thousands were reduced to the verge of starvation. The undertakers and mental hospitals were the only "industries" that were kept busy. The absurd anomaly occurred of a wealthy country, equipped with machinery and man-power to produce goods in abundance, a land "flowing with milk and honey", being suddenly reduced overnight to a state of destitution.

Nobody understood it then, and nobody except the perpetrators understand it yet, and the futile explanations given by "Financial Experts" only make confusion worse confounded. Some fatuous and blasphemous individuals tried to tell us that it was "an Act of God" and just had to occur at certain given periods, but only the very simple and innocent-swallowed arrant nonsense of that kind.

Some even more feeble-minded "experts" even tried to tell us that it was the result of "Sun Spots". They didn't try to explain just how the sun spots worked, and nobody bothered to ask them because nobody bothered to believe them.

In spite of all the specious excuses and explanations, everybody understood that as God had nothing to do with it, and as nature was behaving normally, it must be the result of man's stupidity—or worse.

However, most of us were not interested at that time in the whys and wherefores. That was for later days when we had time to draw our breath and start to think.

All we realized at the time was that the nightmare we we had been experiencing in our district through drought, hail and pests (non-human) was a dream of paradise compared to the inferno, that "man's inhumanity to man" inflicted on us.

At first we did not pay much attention to it. We felt that we were so flat and deflated already that nothing much

could affect us. We were used to being pressed, depressed, repressed and oppressed, and we thought that we had reached an all-time low in our living conditions, and when the jolt came it caught us off balance.

During the twenties when the so-called boom was on, the banks and mortgage companies had been more than generous at 8%. In fact they were assiduous in their pleadings with us to borrow money and more money. They would even come out on the street and suggest to us that if we needed this, that or the other thing, all we had to do was to step into the bank, sign a few insignificant documents and walk out with a credit to our account of a few hundred or a thousand dollars (minus the first year's interest). Sometimes, when one went to them to borrow two or three hundred dollars, they would gently but firmly insist that it wasn't enough, and that we had better double the amount.

The result of this super-generosity on the part of our "friendly banker" was that a great many farmers and small business men went on a buying binge and bought everything in sight from rubber-tired buggies to threshing machines.

The "depression" changed all that. The "friendly banker" disappeared, transferred to some other locality, and was replaced by a very different kind of person. The new bank manager was given specific instructions. His one duty was "to collect". Unfortunately, though he was, in most cases, eminently suited for the job, right at the start he bumped into an insurmountable obstacle. There just wasn't anything to collect, so the famed problem of an irresistible force meeting an immovable obstacle was exemplified in our vicinity. The result was a good deal of bruising and

battering on both sides, with not much material damage to either party. The farmer had nothing to lose anyway, and the banker was just out a certain amount of ink and ledger keeping.

Fortunately or unfortunately—it depends on the point of view—after about ten years of this muddle-headed stupidity, the Powers-that-Be discovered another form of the same stupidity that annulled the effects of the first. During ten long years all the money in the world had mysteriously vanished and nobody seemed to know to what other inaccessible planet it had gone. In 1939 some financial geniuses suddenly discovered that, in order to bring “Business” (and incidentally perhaps the people) back to normal (whatever that is) some way would have to be found of bringing this money or credit into existence again, and, after wracking their brains to discover some way to lift “Business” out of the doldrums without running up against a mysterious disease called “Inflation”, they decided that the only thing to do was to have another war on a grand scale.

This was accomplished without too much trouble and the results were astounding. The money and credit that had so mysteriously disappeared, suddenly flooded the country and everything in the garden was lovely again.

Which goes to prove that if you want real prosperity you must always be able to lay your hands on a nice juicy war. I sometimes wonder why the man who invented that extraordinary slogan “Export or Perish” hasn’t extended himself to invent the slogan “A permanent war means permanent prosperity”. One is just about as sane as the other.

One of the worst effects of the “Depression” (the capital letter is to show due reverence) as far as the “Experts” were

concerned, was that it started people asking questions. This is always dangerous, because if the right answers are not forthcoming, the questioners are likely to probe around and find the answers for themselves.

As far as our life was concerned, things went on just about the same as usual. Somehow financial and economic shortages never seemed to make much difference to us. We still lived, and got a kick out of living. We didn't let our possessions possess us, possibly because we didn't have any to speak of, and the absence of them didn't seem to bother us much. Maybe we found so much fun in life that we didn't even know we had missed out on them.

We liked having lots of money — when we had it, but I have a sneaking idea that we really enjoyed life more when we hadn't any, and had to scheme out our daily budget with red ink.

We used to get far more fun making out rare orders from some mail-order house for goods and clothing we needed, than we have since the bank account has grown so that we can get anything in moderation without much money.

The method of procedure we employed was something like this: First we would make out an order for all the things we would like; then we would cut it down to the things we actually needed; after that we would whittle it down to the things we just *had* to have, and then, having counted our cash, we would cut it in half, and send the order off.

And then there was our radio. Yes, we had a radio—of a kind. What a radio that was! It wasn't like anything you see nowadays. One wouldn't buy it as an article of furniture or as an ornament, like some people buy a piano.

This was a real radio. It wasn't very big. Its four tubes stuck up out of it like four sore thumbs. Its loud speaker didn't hide itself in among its inner workings either. It was a huge affair that took up more room than the radio itself. As radios go today-it really wasn't much, but we got more fun out of it than we ever have since out of the elaborate cabinet or mantel sets with which we have experimented. We also seemed to get more and better programmes than we can now since governments started interfering. The jokes were real jokes, and the music WAS music; we could roam the world at will.

Of course, the blessed thing would squall and squeak at times, but even that was interesting in a way. But what I liked most about it was its habit of going wrong quite often. That gave me an excuse for tinkering with its innards. Though I knew nothing about wireless, I got to know that radio intimately, and delighted in taking it apart and putting it together again at the slightest excuse.

There was one thing about the radios and cars of those days that was pleasantly different to the later models. They weren't secretive. They were right out in the open, so to speak, and if anything went wrong with their tummies you could dig into them with a screw driver, a razor blade or a cold chisel and straighten them out. The radios and cars of today are more reserved and resent undue familiarity. No ordinary individual would dare tackle one even if you could see their innards without an X-ray machine. If you have to get one fixed you have to call in an "expert". He will take it away, put it on a shelf or in a garage for a week or two, bring it back, tell you it's all right and "here's the bill".

Maybe the trip has shaken up the works so that it per-

forms with reasonable efficiency for a while—or, on the other hand, maybe it doesn't. In any event you can't do anything about it. If you resort to the old screw-driver or razor blade, you get a notice from some department official informing you that you have infringed on Labour Code No. 4936, Chapter 482, Page 730, Paragraph 6, and are liable to a fine or imprisonment.

About this time, too, I acquired a car. At least the dealer assured me it was a car, and when he demonstrated its paces it just purred along like anything.

I think, though, that when he left me with it he must have taken the purr with him. Under my treatment it just yowled.

It is just barely possible that I didn't have the delicacy of touch that was needed to make a car purr—or even move. I had never driven a car. In fact I didn't even know the carburettor from the hind axle, so I don't altogether blame the car for some of the queer things that happened when I got behind the wheel.

I shall never forget the first time I drove it. The dealer had sent a man with me to drive the first hundred miles and explain the different gadgets (there were about three hundred of them), after which I was to be on my own and get the contraption home the best way I could.

Somehow the dealer had wangled a driver's license for me. How he did it I don't know. If he had any conscience at all he must have given it an opiate that put it to sleep for a time. Fortunately, the people I met on the road didn't know any more about my ignorance of a car than the man who issued the license, otherwise some of them might have died of heart failure.

I started out with a firm grip on the wheel. I didn't realize how firm it was until I tried to loosen my hand from it.

For the first mile or two I crawled slowly forward at about fifteen miles an hour, but as nothing disastrous happened, I got bolder and was soon flashing over the landscape at the terrific speed of 25 miles an hour.

Once I met a hay rack loaded with hay and nearly had a fit. A hayrack takes up considerable space on a narrow road and I felt quite incapable of steering my contraption around it without going into the ditch. Fortunately, I had the presence of mind to stop and let the other fellow do the steering around me. He managed it somehow and I breathed a sigh of relief.

After fiddling with the brakes and levers and other complications, I somehow got the thing going again. Unfortunately, instead of going forward the creature started backwards and I nearly landed in the ditch.

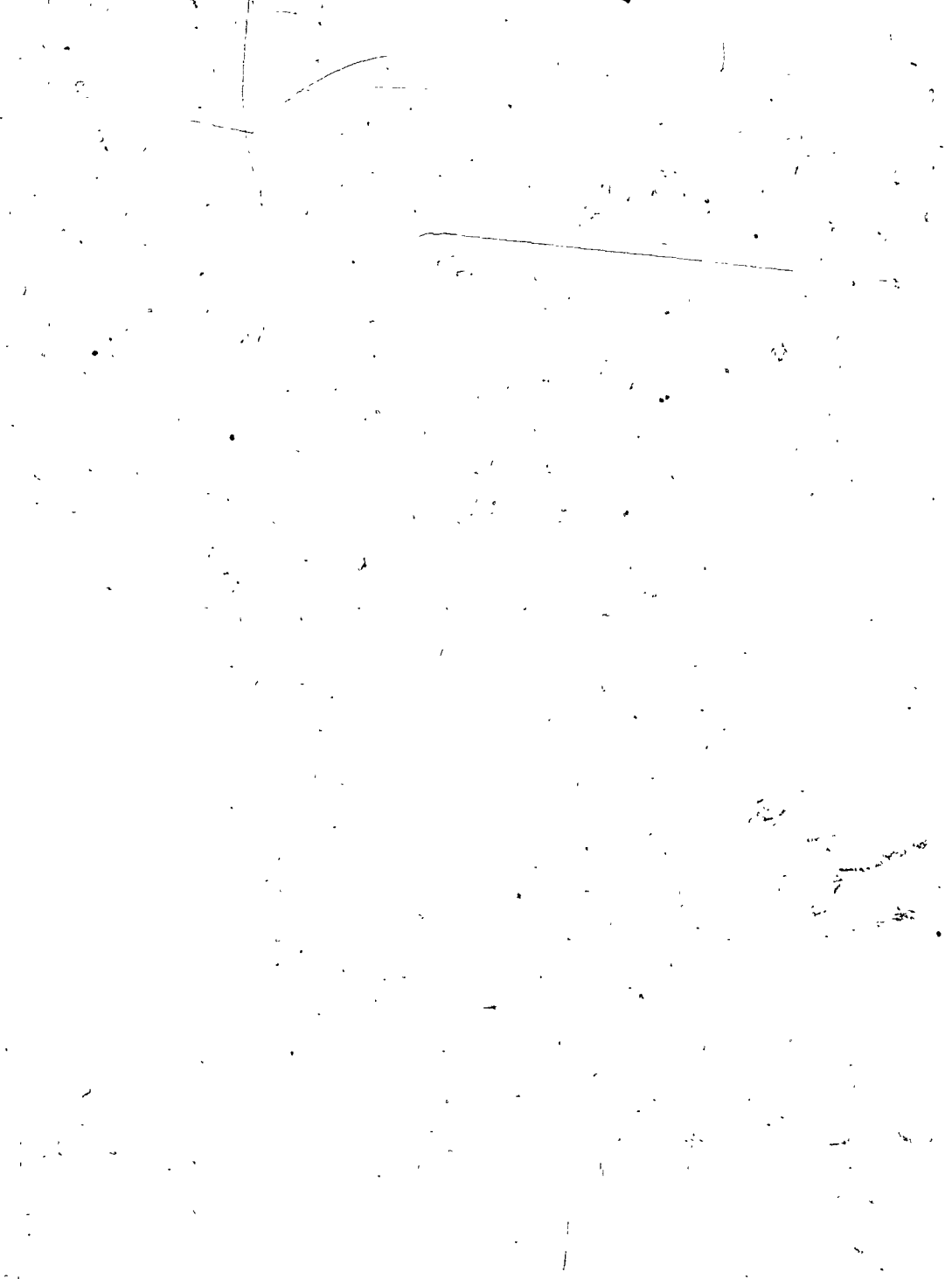
By good luck, I happened to step on the brake in time to stay on the road, and after a little more manipulation I happened on the right gadget and got going again. From then on I kept a steady pace until I arrived within sight of the house, and then I thought I had better do a little showing off and so speeded up to the dizzy pace of 35 M.P.H. Just at the turn of the road was an old rock pile, and someone had discarded an old broken down cook stove on it.

I fixed my eyes on that stove and determined that I just wouldn't drive over it. Somehow the thing seemed to fascinate me or the car, and the first thing I knew I was right on top of it. Luckily it didn't seem to bother the car much,

and we slid over it and landed safely on the other side. Nobody had witnessed the accident so I went sailing gallantly on and turned in at the gate (missing the post by about an inch), tore up the drive-way in grand style—and forgot to stop.

Fortunately the wall of the barn was stout and stood the collision, and again I was lucky enough to hit the brake with my foot before the car buckled, and eventually sneaked up to the house.

This rather spoiled the effect of my grand entrance, but the family were so entranced with the shininess of the car that they soon forgot the driver, and, aside from a few shattered nerves, no harm resulted and—we had a car.



Spasm Nineteen

WHO WANTS FULL EMPLOYMENT?—I DON'T!

They say a leopard can't change his spots, and I suppose it's more or less correct. The spots are there for a purpose and, given the usual environment and circumstances, the spots can't be washed off. But get the leopard out of the environment of the brush and trees and put him on the prairie, in time the spots would disappear. Of course, he'd still be the same leopard underneath, but he'd look more respectable, even if less picturesque.

I had three (at least) spots in my otherwise unblemished character. One was my dislike of school teachers, one was my abhorrence of politics, and the third was my distaste for work of any kind.

The first two came from the experience of past years, and I guess I was born with the last.

I have told you about the school teachers. They were—and perhaps still are—a weird lot who seemed to be set apart in a little world of their own. They "taught school" and the young humans with whom they came in contact (sometimes physically), were only incidental to their main occupation. Being teachers they naturally had to have something to teach. We were the victims.

My second spot was not quite so personal. I didn't like politics because observation of politicians had led me to the

conclusion that it was a childish and rather dirty game that nice clean little boys and girls would carefully avoid.

Since then I have had a lot to do with politics, and have seen no reason to change my mind.

Naturally when I speak of "politics" I mean "Party Politics". That's about the only kind we have had a chance to study for a long time.

It was, at least partially, through a school teacher that I got dragged into politics, although some of us claim that our real objective is not politics at all. After about twelve years of it most of us still look on the political party we had to form as merely a means to an end.

The "school teacher" was really only the beginning of my fall from grace. The "Depression" and the inevitable questioning it aroused in the minds of a lot of people prepared the ground. The misery, destitution and slum conditions of the people in a country as wealthy as Canada was a puzzle that almost forced us to think, and the inane and stupid explanations given us by politicians and orthodox economists aroused a suspicion in our minds that there was something rotten in the state of our democracy.

And then along came the school teacher to explain over the air and platform the real cause of the muddle. He told us the story of the manipulation of money and credit and just how it ticked. Of course, he roused an uproar of jeers and abuse, and the Press really went to town on his personal character and statements, though the denials and refutations were all vague and inconclusive.

They were a little too late in their campaign. The school teacher had started people thinking and questioning, and it took more than personal abuse and sneers to stop them.

I have written of this man as a school teacher, but he

was far more than that. William Aberhart was a big man in every way. He was big physically, but mentally he was a giant, and his personality was so powerful that he attracted more affection and hate than any man I have ever known. You might dislike him or disagree with him, but you couldn't ignore him.

He was a master of logic and cool reasoning, and yet had so many human weaknesses—if you care to call them that—that he endeared himself to the ordinary people by his very humanness.

He was distinctly not a demagogue, but was a forceful and convincing speaker, and it wasn't long before he had everybody within sound of his voice listening to his story of the criminal stupidity of our "poverty in the midst of plenty".

To many of us it was a staggering revelation. We had known in a kind of vague way that the whole situation was absurd, but with an urgent desire to "let George do it" we hadn't had the sense or energy to delve down to the root cause of our social and economic chaos. William Aberhart, with his irrefutable logic and his factual information, clarified our somewhat muddled questioning.

If he had been content with pointing out just what was wrong with the economic system of the so-called Democracy we worshipped, he could probably have got away with it, but he was not content with destructive criticism. He not only pointed out the disease but described the remedy. This was unforgivable.

To expose the evil was bad enough, but, knowing the lethargy of mind of the average man the perpetrators might have ignored him. But when he actually dared point to the sane way out of the muddle, he aroused both the anger and

the fear of the fanatical followers of the "Sound Money" philosophy, and the resultant abuse and "smear" campaign has never been equalled in the political and economic life of Canada.

However, I am writing neither a biography of William Aberhart nor a history of the Social Credit movement in Alberta. I am just trying to explain how I got dragged into the political arena.

I had listened to this man over the radio, and in consequence had read and studied some books on economics, and had become thoroughly convinced that, to date, we had all been absolutely crazy, and that it was time we got back to something approaching sanity in our national life.

I have already told you how I had somehow landed myself in the position of having to travel around the country "sermonizing". Being imbued with the idea that there was a simple and natural remedy for our social and economic ills, and feeling that "religion" was something that should affect our lives here and now as well as in the hereafter, I got the rather dangerous habit of mixing practical Christianity with religion.

I know it wasn't orthodox, and was rather frowned upon by the clergy, but being a humble "lay preacher" I didn't feel the same responsibility to "the cloth" that inhibited most of the preachers.

This was rather a difficult time for me. I had always derived a lot of satisfaction from a feeling of detached irresponsibility in regard to public affairs. I had wanted to go my own sweet way, not making much of a splurge, but spreading a little gaiety among the rather drab environment in which we were placed, without getting mixed up with the rather painful people who were obsessed with the

idea that "Life was real, Life was earnest", and who tried to see to it that it never became anything else. Somehow or other I now found myself landed right in the middle of them. Reality and earnestness are doubtless excellent, but to have to take them "neat" is rather deadly.

And so I found myself being forced into a position for which I was ill-fitted. To be at the same time an irresponsible and rather joyous nonentity and an earnest and humourless social and economic reformer was somewhat of a headache.

Eventually I decided that, like the leopard, I would at all costs retain my nature even though I had to get rid of some of the external spots. In the life I have had to follow during the last dozen or so years, retaining a little sane gaiety has been rather a strain, but somehow, with the aid of my equally irresponsible wife, I have managed it so far.

Before long I found myself accepting invitations to address different rural audiences at country school houses on subjects connected with the causes underlying our poverty and distress, and outlining what I believed to be the way out.

This involved a far more intensive study than I liked. You will have gathered, if you have read this far, that I am not naturally an industrious person, and "work for work's sake" has never appealed to me as being either pleasant or sensible, so this taking up the white man's burden was not a pleasant prospect.

However, I had embarked on the crusade, and unless I wanted to face critical audiences who had the unpleasant habit of asking awkward questions, without the necessary information, I just had to do some studying.

I am not going into the details of the economic revolution proposed. Many good books have been written on the subject by people who have given it a life-long study. You can read them for yourselves.

I am merely giving you an outline of my activities so that I can prepare you for the shock of finding me at a later date sitting as a Member of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta. If you get half the shock I did, you'll need more than a few aspirins to help you survive.

What small success I attained was, I think, due to the fact that I was just an ordinary person, and so knew what other ordinary people were thinking. Being just ordinary I naturally used ordinary language, and so was able to put into words what my audience had been thinking for some time—perhaps without knowing it.

Anyway, the movement spread like a prairie fire, and before long we had study groups meeting all over the province.

By this time there were a lot of speakers, travelling around explaining to eager audiences the economic set-up as it was, and as it could be under a more rational system. Some of the speakers were really eloquent, and some were not, but they were all in deadly earnest, and if some were rather halting and blundering in their approach, their very sincerity convinced where their lack of oratory failed.

This sudden crop of orators springing up gave me a chance to retire into the background—for a time.

Having done my small share of the spadework, I felt I was entitled to a rest.

As a matter of fact I really don't remember the time when I didn't think I was entitled to a rest.

I am rather proud of my undoubted ability to rest. Not

many people have this ability. Almost anybody can work, even if they don't accomplish much, but it takes a real genius to rest scientifically. I have spent years perfecting the art.

Unfortunately, just as I begin to think I can take advantage of my genius for resting, something always crops up to spoil my plans and I have to get going again.

Since the curtain has dropped on the second Act of the World War, there have been a lot of raucous politicians rushing round the country shrieking that what our country needs is "Full Employment".

What a horrible idea!

Can you imagine anything more awful than a whole worldful of people spending their whole precious or semi-precious lives in "full employment?"

Look where we have landed ourselves even now, just working spasmodically. If we all got really busy where would we end up?

Wasn't it the Gadarene swine who, when they got possessed with a demoniac urge to "do something", ran down a steep hill and got drowned in the sea?

After all, the greatest geniuses of the world have been of such restful dispositions that they spent their lives inventing machines that would do the work for us and let us rest.

If it wasn't for the "full employment" maniacs we could all be confining our interference with nature's laws to about three hours a day and have the remainder of the twenty-four hours for rest, recreation, and the pursuit of intelligence. The machines, if they were allowed, would do the work.

When I was very young, my elders made me learn that horrible little poem which went something like this:—

"How doth the little busy bee improve each
shining hour.

To gather honey all the day from every
opëning flower."

This was done to impress me with the virtue of industry, but after all, when one comes to think about it, what right had the bee to the honey anyway, and what good did it do him? Some unscrupulous human came along and swiped it from him in the end.

I guess I've got a bit off the track in these last few paragraphs, but I get rather rabid when I hear all this "blah" about the virtues of work. If we really DID improve each shining hour it might be all right, but as a matter of fact the more we meddle the more we muddle.

Spasm Twenty

SOMETHING MUST BE DONE

I think most of us, including even William Aberhart, were green and innocent enough to imagine that, once the people realized the insanity of our financial and economic system and where it was leading us, the rest would be plain sailing. To our childlike minds the evidence was so irrefutable, and the dire consequences so apparent, that even an old die-hard politician couldn't be blind to it.

We figured that the Party-In-Office (they're never really in power) would understand that the people who elected them wanted a change, and that they would immediately bring it about.

Knowing what I do now, I am inclined to think that our knowledge of party politics and all its intricacies was almost criminally negligible.

I am sure that none of us dreamed for a minute that we, personally and individually, would ever have to get really mixed up in party politics. We possibly thought, in a vague kind of way, that in order to bring about a change in the economic system, and consequently in our social and home existence, certain legislation would have to be introduced, but we didn't imagine that we might actually have to do it ourselves.

Neither did we have the slightest idea of the hurricane

of bitterness and hatred we would arouse against ourselves and our ideals.

If we had, we might not have been so brash about the whole business, though I like to think we would have gone ahead with it anyway.

When I first got mixed up in this economic and social reform business, I hadn't the faintest idea of what it would mean. If I had known it would disrupt and change my

am glad now that I did. It has been worth while, though I sometimes look back with regret to the peaceful life on the farm, when the only pests we had to encounter were four-footed, and our only real enemies were drought, hail or blizzards. Then it was OUR life. Now it's anybody's.

Being of the shrinking violet type, the idea of publicity has always scared me, and even after about twelve years of

Press is so unpredictable that you never know where you're at.

They claim that their editorials "lead public opinion", but somehow or other they seem to reverse themselves so often that the result is rather confusing to the average mind.

At this part of my life I find myself in a most confusing position. I started out to give the reader an account of a man who never professed to be anything but a nobody among a lot of nobodies, but, though I'm still a nobody (I hope) I've got myself so inextricably mixed up with national and international problems, that my own private life shrinks into insignificance.

I had always been interested in my immediate neighbours and friends, but now I find that circle so enlarged

that it takes in far more territory than I care to contemplate. Friends and neighbours had been local; now they had become universal. They had been just a community, now they have become a cross-section, and what I had thought was a special brand of people I now find to be a just run-of-the-orchard sample of humanity as a whole.

As I like, admire and respect them, I find myself in the awkward though rather enjoyable necessity of liking and respecting a lot of people of whom I haven't even heard.

I don't suppose you will understand the predicament in which I found myself, because most of you have taken yourselves more seriously than I did. Of course, you were right and I was wrong. I had just neglected to cultivate the idea that my puny little existence could mean anything in the general scheme of things. I know now that we all have our part to play, even if it's only a clown's part. The chief trouble these days is to distinguish the clown from the hero. Often the hero (especially in politics) is more clownish than the clown himself.

I think it was in the late months of 1932 that we really started to get busy. That was the year that the "slump" or "depression" was reaching its peak, and the misery and destitution of the people had reached its lowest depth.

Our main objective at the start was to bring to light the absurdity of the situation. In a country whose powers of production were almost unlimited; with granaries and warehouses filled to bursting-point; with store shelves piled high with goods which everybody needed, and which the storekeepers were anxious to get rid of, everybody had to go without because of the sudden shortage of "tickets".

We pointed out that, though there was nothing wrong with our productive capacity, the tickets to distribute were

so criminally lacking that everybody, except a favoured few, was in danger of starving to death or being arrested for being in a state of nudity.

There was nothing spectacular about this. In a vague way we had all been aware that there was something tragically stupid going on, but this was the first time people had been made aware of the actual root of the trouble.

I remember at about this time a play was put out over the radio. It depicted a "Man from Mars" paying a visit to the Earth and asking awkward questions, and receiving answers in regard to our political and economic life that were painfully true and humiliating.

In this play the truth was brought out that the inhabitants of Earth had plenty to eat, plenty to wear, plenty of material for homes and comforts and even luxuries (by the way, what is a luxury?), and were nevertheless deprived of all these things by a financial bottleneck—lack of tickets—that forbade the people to benefit from them.

I think in the end the "Man from Mars" went back home bewildered and disgusted, leaving us to our fate. Small blame to him. I wonder what he told his fellow Martians! Anyway, if they listen to him they won't bother to invade Canada for a time.

My respite from this active work was short-lived. The people were so avid for information—circumstances being what they were—that the speakers were all too few, and the demand for their appearance all over the province was greater than the supply. (Is that, by the way, inflation or deflation?).

This meant that, as far as our district was concerned, I just had to get back into harness. I didn't want to, but having a car—of sorts—in which to travel, and the clamor

being insistent, and my habit of meddling having grown, I found myself once more travelling around the country and expounding what I thought—and still think—the principles of Christianity and Democracy as evidenced in the philosophy of Social Credit.

I still had not the faintest idea that this kind of thing would eventually drag me into a political life. I fondly hoped that the pressure of the people would force the political party in office into action.

Unfortunately, that party had been returned at the last election by a very substantial majority, and seemed to be very firmly entrenched. They had dug themselves into a departmental trench that seemed snug and secure, and had no intention of being routed out of it, and they just couldn't believe that, instead of being the popular idols they supposed, they had become a bunch of "has-beens" with their thoughts in the past.

They were mostly honest and sincere men, but had been so long in office that Departmental responsibilities had come to mean more to them than the will of a lot of ignorant people.

In consequence, when William Aberhart went to them and tried to convince them of the reality of the crisis they and the people were facing, he was laughed out of court.

This meant that William Aberhart and his fellow-workers had to get busy politically. If the Party in Office wouldn't do anything, somebody had to do it for them.

And so the first Social Credit political organization was formed, and they prepared for the coming electoral battle which was slated for 1935.

And STILL I didn't get it into my head that I would be involved. I carried on my activities whenever I had

time, but I was working spasmodically from the outside, and had so little interest in what we called politics that the thought of my being much more than a sympathetic voter was too preposterous to contemplate.

I supposed in a dreamy way that we, in our district, would have to provide a suitable candidate, and I wondered in the same hazy way who he would be, but I had no thought, intention or desire to be the sacrificial victim. While I knew that political sacrificial victims are always fattened up in preparation, I also knew that they generally ended up in the soup.

And then, what I didn't know about Legislative Assemblies and the funny business they went through would fill a whole library. I had never ever seen our present "sitting Member", (why they call them "sitting Members" I can't fathom—they seem to be always on their feet) and held him in a certain amount of awe as one set apart from the common herd. The idea of taking his place in the Legislature would have been a nightmare if I had so much as dreamed of it.

Of course I found out later that, though a decent chap in his way, his weight was rather negligible, and his views on economics were comparable to those of the Neanderthal Man.

I had lots of fun with him later on during the election campaign, but just at that time I had not "broken through", and realized that these chaps whom WE had elected were just common clay like the rest of us.

Meanwhile our home life went on just about the same as usual, though I have a strong suspicion that my wife had already decided that the three initials M.L.A. would look well at the end of my name. She never said so, of course,

but there was a gleam in her eye that should have warned me if I had not been so blinded by that superiority complex that gave me the impression that my nature was too ethereal for the contaminations of political life.

The election campaign hadn't really started then, so I had no warning of what was in store for me.

As a matter of fact, just when things began to get a little warm, I landed in the hospital with pleurisy and a few other trivial complications, and this seemed to be sufficient excuse for my retirement. I had a delightful time in the hospital. The nurses were lovely and devoted, and if it hadn't been for a persistent and conscientious doctor (he afterwards became Minister of Health) I would either have been there yet or have been occupying a cozy corner in a nearby cemetery.

This Dr. Cross had other ideas for me—or else he wanted my bed for someone else, — and soon had me back on the farm, a bit wobbly, but still in the ring.

I still remember the first convention we held: If evidence was needed to prove that we knew nothing of politics or parliamentary procedure, that convention would have provided it. We knew we had to have a chairman, and one was chosen, but, knowing no more of the proper method of procedure than the rest of us, he insisted on having an assistant. The latter had more confidence in himself (though I never found out why), and proceeded to give his advice on every possible occasion. The consequence of dual personality chairmanship was confusion worse confounded. Before the afternoon was over the meeting was in an uproar, and the chairman retired, due to "ill health".

Before the evening session came on it was necessary to

find at least one more chairman, and, as usual, whenever anything unpleasant had to be done, I was the victim.

I knew rather less than the other two about the correct way to conduct a meeting, the only difference being that, whereas they, like the proverbial Chinaman, "knew not, and knew not that they knew not", I, like the other proverbial Chinaman, "knew not and knew that I knew not," and decided that I would forget all that I ever knew about such things, and just use what limited common sense I had.

I have often wondered since why this procedure was not followed in Parliament.

Anyway, common sense won out, and we ended up with a very successful meeting, and got quite a lot accomplished (which, by the way, made it more unparliamentary than ever).

At later meetings and conventions we did much better, and things went along more smoothly, but I still think this particular convention was the most interesting and unorthodox, though the nominating convention a little later ran it a close second.

Spasm Twenty-one

PICKING THE CANDIDATE

After this convention we really got busy. It had been decided that if we were going into this thing at all, we'd better do it right, and would have a candidate in every constituency. At that time there were sixty-three constituencies in Alberta; ten in the two cities and the balance rural.

Ours was naturally a rural constituency, which meant that we covered a large area of land with a comparatively small population.

We set a date for our nominating convention, where we were to choose the all-important person to represent us.

This is where our system of selecting a candidate outraged all the traditions of the old line parties. To some minds, this innovation was even worse than our revolutionary economic ideas. It was decided that each constituency should, at a properly constituted nominating convention, select four possible candidates, and that an advisory committee should examine these four and decide which was the most suitable.

This procedure has been severely criticised as being undemocratic, etc., and perhaps it was, but it did away with the "packed" conventions that had made the nomination conventions of the old line parties such a farce, and on the

whole, proved fairly satisfactory. (Especially in my case of course).

This is not a treatise on political campaigns, so I won't bore you with all the preliminary preparations. As we had no "party machine" there was some confusion. Everybody got very excited and rushed round in circles for a time. The usual crop of political aspirants bobbed up, and everybody became an orator overnight. Some of the antics were funny, and some rather pitiful, but things levelled off after a time, and we got down to business.

The nominating convention was set for a certain date at a small town named Oyen, near the east boundary of the constituency and province. It was somewhere about sixty miles from my home, and as I had not fully recovered from my illness, I decided not to go to it.

Though my name had been mentioned tentatively by a few neighbours as a possible candidate, the idea was considered by the family as more of a joke than a problem to be seriously discussed.

The whole thing was so completely outside our experience that we never seriously contemplated the possibility.

I knew little or nothing about political life, and what second hand information I had garnered was not encouraging. It is possible to be "in politics" and keep fairly clean, but the impression I had at that time was that it was a rather belittling life, and I wanted none of it.

After about twelve years of it, during which I have "viewed with alarm", "pointed with pride" and stated "without fear of successful contradiction", and mouthed empty nothings about "this fair country of ours" with the best of them, I have found my first impressions fairly correct. It is a belittling life, and though I have found most politicians

as straight and decent as people will let them be, yet I have found, too, that one's sense of values becomes warped almost unconsciously.

However, somewhere in the Book of Fate it was written that I was to be thrust into the maelstrom, and I wasn't strong enough to withstand the pressure.

On the morning of the convention a carload of people drove up to our door and almost dragged me out. The first excuse was that they needed me to drive my car and take others to the convention, and it was only barely hinted that I might be needed for other purposes.

Nearly all politicians since the beginning of time (they had the pests even then) have made the claim that I am now trying to put over, that they were personally "too modest and retiring to aspire to such an exalted position, but that they had yielded to the irresistible pressure of their many friends and neighbours." So there is nothing original in my claim.

How many times have I heard something like the following coming from the lips of politicians who have spent months lobbying and manoeuvring for the very thing they accepted "so reluctantly": (Quote)

"Ladies and gentlemen, though I feel greatly the honour you have done me in nominating me as your candidate, it is with great reluctance I assume the responsibility, and it is only my sense of duty as a citizen that makes me feel that I should put my undoubted talents at the service of my country." (Unquote), and so on ad nauseam.

But I really didn't want the job. It meant uprooting our family life, and facing the kind of life the thought of which I had always detested.

Once I had got into the fracas, though, the excitement

of the campaign made it a rather jolly adventure, and since then the fight we had to carry on has got into my blood and made it more than worth while, but at that time I was distinctly averse to getting too mixed up with the political end of the movement, and would rather have grubbed along on the farm.

However, I started in to tell you of our first nominating convention. To me it was a unique experience. I had never been to one, much less taken part in one before. I have been mixed up (literally) in others since, but this one stands out in my memory as the best of them all. It was the best because it was the most refreshingly honest (except perhaps in spots). It was honest because we didn't know any better then. Nobody was trying to climb on the band wagon — because there wasn't yet any band wagon upon which to climb.

I am not trying to tell you that I have become less honest since then. If I had I shouldn't tell you anyway. If a man is honest enough to acknowledge he is dishonest, then he must be too honest to be dishonest.

YOU try and figure that out. I can't.

When we got there, the hall was already filling up. Delegates had come, some on horseback, some in buggies or wagons, and some in an odd assortment of what, for want of a more descriptive word, were called cars (mostly without any license plates). The delegates were mostly farmers, near farmers and synthetic farmers, though there was a sprinkling of school teachers (some of them were synthetic too), merchants, implement dealers, and an odd preacher, (nothing invidious meant in the use of the adjective). There was a noticeable absence of "professional

men" and, what was remarkable in a political convention, there wasn't a single lawyer in the hall.

I have never been as allergic to lawyers as I have to school teachers. Perhaps that's because they never entered into my younger life. In private life I have found most lawyers rather average decent human beings, even if, outside the law, their general intelligence seems to be slightly sub-normal. A school teacher is different. Public or private, he is always a school teacher.

A lawyer in public or semi-public life is something else again. The plain simple English language seems abhorrent to him, and everything has to be translated into a certain strange jargon that only the legal mind can understand. I have seen certain Acts that we have decided on in "caucus", so transmogrified by the time they have gone through the legal department that none of us could recognise them, and only when we have tried to enforce them have we found their utter impracticability.

I don't know why lawyers do this kind of thing. Perhaps it's for the same reason the medical profession always write their prescriptions in a language that nobody but a chemist can understand.

Perhaps in both cases they realize that if the people understood what the language meant they would refuse to open their mouths and swallow the dose.

The fact that there were no lawyers at our convention made it rather unique. I don't know if it was actually a record, but it must at least have been a rare occasion. Perhaps we lost out in "culture", but we gained in simple common sense.

On looking over the records of the various governments that have been "in office" in the Democracies I find that

the percentage of lawyers has been about 80%. (We *are* in a mess, aren't we?)

It did not take us long to get down to business. Having selected a chairman and gone through the usual preliminaries, nominations for candidates were called for; and by the time they were all in, there were twelve aspirants. We were a weird lot. There were three or four school teachers, an auctioneer, a druggist, a post-master, and some farmers—and myself.

With such a powerful array of talent preceding me I didn't think I was in much danger of being the victim so let my name stand.

After the nominations, we were all invited to the platform and sat in a row behind the Chairman. I got behind the piano.

Then the fun began. Each one had to make a four-minute speech to explain his existence (if reasonably possible) and prove that he was the only possible solution to the problem of choosing a candidate.

I still sat behind the piano.

After listening to the marvellous records of their lives and accomplishments, I felt more sure than ever that I was out of my class and safe.

What they hadn't accomplished individually and collectively wasn't worth mentioning. Some of them even dared to bring in their ancestors.

By the time they got through, I was convinced that if any one of them was selected, we'd have a combination of Lincoln, Washington and Gladstone to represent us in the Legislative Assembly.

They were super-colossal, and how they got it all into a minute speech was something in the nature of a miracle.

After the eleven had got through, the Chairman counted down his list and discovered that one was missing. Someone suggested that he look behind the piano. I came out rather shame-facedly and stood before them. I knew I just couldn't compete with such talent, so didn't try. My little speech went something like this:—

"Ladies and Gentlemen—You have heard the splendid records of these gentlemen and have been told all about their accomplishments. They have bared their lives for your inspection, and I feel that, after what we have heard this afternoon, we must have come to the conclusion that any one of them would make a fitting candidate (I didn't state for what), and I don't intend to compete with them by telling you what I have done or left undone in my past. In fact I think the less you know about my past, the better it will be for you—and me too."

And I went back behind the piano.

After this we were released and I felt that, as far as I was concerned, the danger was past and I could relax.

While they were distributing the ballot papers, I collected my wife and went out for a cup of coffee. After a time other delegates came in and sat with us. The ballots were still being counted so we didn't hurry back.

About an hour later, another bunch came in, showing traces of excitement, and I wondered what was happening. One of them spied me and came over, and I got the shock of my life. It appeared that my name was on the top of the list and that, along with three others, I was elected to go before the Advisory Board who—were to choose the final candidate.

We went back to the convention, of course, but the rest of the meeting is somewhat blurred in my mind. I had to

make a speech, but what I said I don't think I knew at the time, and I certainly can't remember now.

The other nominees were all good sports and were as friendly as ever, and in the ensuing campaign were to prove a tower of strength to "our side".

The next few months were a nightmare. Two meetings a day over an area of hundreds of square miles, and a speech at every meeting. Most people can prepare one speech and use it over and over again. I have never been able to really prepare a speech, and when I get through, I hardly ever know what I have said (neither does the audience), so I always have to make a fresh speech wherever I go. This puts me at a disadvantage, and is rather exhausting.

Besides the speech, there were dozens of questions to answer, and also the job of outheckling the heckler.

At first I was scared stiff. In past elections I had sometimes, just for the fun of it, taken the job of heckling, and had often asked the most awkward questions I could, just to get the speaker's goat, but I had never before been the heckled or questioned. It makes quite a difference which end of the question you are on.

After the first meeting I was a nervous wreck, but I soon grasped the fact that the heckler was either just showing off or was put up to the job (sometimes at so much per heckle) by the opposition parties, and the questioner didn't know the answer to the question any more than I did. This gave me confidence, and after the first couple of weeks, outside of travelling hundreds of miles over impassable roads to meetings with audiences ranging from ten to two hundred, I began to really enjoy the campaign.

You have probably been through a lot of election cam-

paings and all this is stale to you, but if you want to get a real kick out of it, just try being on the receiving end.

I wasn't yet the candidate. I was only one of four possibilities, so the Opposition couldn't concentrate on my personal character—or lack of it. That came later.

The four possible candidates used to travel in pairs at that time, and share the honours and abuse, and it speaks rather well for the cause we represented that every one of the four played the game fairly and squarely and never tried to take an unfair advantage of the others.

Some day I may devote a whole book to these meetings. Not that they were important in themselves, though school house meetings have a far greater influence on world affairs than "experts" ever dream of, but they gave an insight into the character of the very ordinary farming population.

I think that city people do not fully appreciate the natural wit, humour and deep thoughtfulness of the rural population. Since then I have had to address audiences ranging from twenty in a rural school-house to five thousand in the cities, and I have found that always the rural audience was at the same time the most difficult and the most satisfactory for the speaker. The most difficult because the most thoughtful—and in consequence the most critical. No flash in the pan answer was good enough for them. "Smartness" was not appreciated. They wanted to KNOW.

The most satisfactory, because, being thinkers, they thought things out to a sane and logical conclusion and then stuck.

I am not a philosopher, but I think that the reason for this was that these people had had to fight. They had had to fight first of all the forces of nature to wrest from the land the living that they had to have, and secondly they

had to fight the "city slicker" represented by political parties and the "financial interests" who waited until they had accumulated something and then snatched it away from them. These conditions had MADE them think, and the result was all to the good.

I am speaking of the rural population of the western provinces, such as Alberta. Perhaps my remarks do not apply to eastern rural populations. They in their affluence may still be dreaming along in a kind of Rip Van Winkle slumber. Being a westerner, I can only judge them by their inactions. Inactions speak louder than words.

The time came, of course, when the four prospective candidates had to be reduced to one. By this time the game had rather got into my blood. I was beginning to really enjoy it.

A fight is always a pleasant diversion, but to fight for all you're worth and keep good tempered through it all is a glorious experience.

On our side at least the issue was less political than economic, and we were out for political power merely as a means to an end.

Anyway I have given you perhaps the first account of a political campaign from the candidate's point of view. It's different. You ought to try it sometime.

Spasm Twenty-two

THE FIRST SOCIAL CREDIT CAMPAIGN

After a few weeks of what we fondly hoped was "campaigning", we were called into Calgary to meet the Advisory Board.

Maybe I had better explain the functions of this Board more clearly to the uninitiated. I have forgotten now how many of them there were. I only know that when I faced them they looked like a firing squad.

The ostensible reason for the Board's existence was to find out by questioning just how much the candidate knew about the technical details connected with the principles of Social Credit. We just couldn't have people going around the country talking what they thought was Social Credit, only to find out later that it was something entirely different.

But I suspect that the real reason for the Board was to provide an opportunity to size up the prospective candidate's general personality and character and pick the best of the four. We couldn't afford too many "duds" in the government.

Of course, the Board was only human and even they did eventually pick a few "duds", but on the whole they did fairly well. (Repeat: especially in my case).

To say that I was nervous would be an almost criminal

understatement. I was positively blithering with fright. I didn't mind their sizing up my character. I knew it to be spotless (except in spots). What I was scared of was "the technical details". Though I knew the fundamental principles of Social Credit, I was, to put it mildly, slightly hazy about these same "technical details". In fact I didn't at that time (and I don't yet) bother with them very much. I figured that if the principles were sound, the details would work themselves out.

However, they were very gentle with me and I got through that part all right. I found out afterwards the reason. The fact was that, with one exception, William Aberhart, the Advisory Board knew rather less about these "technical details" than I did, and that was about on a par with what an income tax collector knows about the milk of human kindness.

As to what they thought about my character and personality I couldn't judge at the time. My only real hope was that there was a lot they didn't know. I was right. There was.

If they had delved into my past, as the Opposition did later—and are still doing—I doubt whether they would have considered me for a moment.

After I had recuperated from this ordeal, I went back on the job. I didn't know yet if I was to be the martyr that was to be thrown to the hyenas or not, but anyway I had a job to do so just got on with it.

There were still four of us to share the abuse, so it wasn't so bad for the next few weeks. We had the Opposition in a cleft. They just didn't know upon whom to concentrate, and when you have to aim at four targets you are liable to miss the lot.

The unfortunate part of it, as far as I was concerned, was that the other three had concentrated on respectability, and I hadn't. I had not deliberately gone out to be unrespectable or disrespectful or whatever you call it. I had just avoided the subject.

Psychiatrists today talk a lot of nonsense about being moral, immoral or unmoral and can define the difference so learnedly that nobody knows what they are talking about. I wasn't respectable, I wasn't deliberately irresponsible, so I must have just been unrespectable. I don't know just what that means, but you can figure it out for yourself, and you can choose for yourself what you want to be. I am making no recommendations. All I can say is that I have had a whale of a time being what I am.

And so the four of us went back on the job of "campaigning". We didn't know much about the technique, but we decided to tell just the plain truth. This was such a ghastly innovation that the people were staggered, and the Opposition was thrown all out of gear.

A political campaign and truth telling were so far apart that they had never connected the two in their minds. In the past that kind of thing just hadn't been done, and they were very indignant over it. In effect they said "You can't do this to us", but we went ahead and did it anyway.

At first the effect was negligible. The people couldn't grasp the fact that a politician COULD tell the truth, but after a time it began to sift into their minds that we actually did mean just what we said, and the results were gratifying. Once you can convince people that you actually mean what you say, they are at least willing to listen.

Then came the time when the announcement was made as to who the real candidate was to be. On the evening

in question, I was scheduled to address a meeting in a neighbouring constituency. I was in the middle of my alleged speech when the news was telephoned through that I had been selected by the Advisory Board as the candidate for our constituency. The applause was rather overwhelming, but I have wondered since whether it was joy over my appointment or relief at getting away from my speech for a time.

I have tried to find out since from members of the Board why they selected me, but the answers were evasive. I have an uncomfortable feeling that they were wondering as much as I was, and have been wondering ever since.

After that all the vials of Opposition wrath naturally fell on my luckless head.

Up until then I had got the idea that I wasn't a bad kind of human—as humans go, and it was a distinct shock to discover what a really sinister character I was. If half what the Opposition said about me was true, I should never have been let loose on an innocent and unoffending public.

It was some small consolation to find that I was only slightly worse than any of the other Social Credit candidates. We seemingly, and without knowing it, were just about the worst bunch of criminals unchanged; and the worst criminal of the lot was William Aberhart.

All this, I was to find out later, was just routine stuff and quite in order, and not to be taken too seriously, and, fortunately, the general public were used to it, and just took it as part of the game.

Besides the greater crimes of which I was accused, were the milder inaccuracies such as, that I was an old bachelor living alone in an old tumble-down shack, and that I wore a wig. I think these two slanders made my wife

more indignant than any of the most vicious scurrilities I ran into.

Some people still insist that I wear a wig, and seem to think it is a crime only slightly less heinous than sheep stealing.

I have had more than one lady (using the word in its looser sense) ask me politely for the privilege of pulling my hair in order to settle a bet. As long as they asked permission and didn't pull too hard, I didn't object much. It was when they pulled first and asked afterwards that I rebelled.

Fortunately, or unfortunately, I have been blessed—or cursed—with a heavy mop of unruly hair, and a lot of women whose husbands are bald resented the fact.

I suppose all election campaigns are about the same, but this was the first in which I was personally interested, so took it more seriously.

Most of the candidates went through the usual motions, mouthed the same old party shibboleths and promised everything they could think up, and as usual nobody really believed a word of it.

Since then I have often wondered if the people would not use saner and more unbiassed judgement in their voting if we had our elections first and our campaigns afterwards. It would save a lot of time, money and perjury.

And while I'm on this subject I might as well get rid of the stupid fabrication that we went around promising everybody \$25.00 a month if they would vote for us. As far I know, that was never done by even the least responsible of the candidates.

We did tell the people that the introduction of the principles of Social Credit in Alberta would guarantee to

everyone at least, food, clothing and shelter, and it was suggested that the inside limit of this would cost \$25 a month. It was not a promise. It was a statement, and its truth has never been refuted or proved.

It has never been refuted because it couldn't be, and it has never been proved because we have never been allowed to demonstrate it.

But enough of that. This is not a treatise on Social Credit. It is supposed to be a kind of autobiography. Maybe it's a rather unusual and cockeyed one, but an autobiography of sorts is all it set out to be.

If I have dragged Social Credit in, it's merely because it has become part of my life for fourteen years.

The election campaign was merely an episode to be recorded. In some ways it was a distinctly unpleasant episode, and by the time I got through I felt I needed fumigating, and that some others had got past the stage when fumigating would do any good.

In other ways, though, it was really good fun, and the rushing around, speeches, applause and abuse, were, after I got over my first fright, rather exhilarating than otherwise.

In spite of the seeming popularity of the Social Credit movement, and the reaction against the idiocy of the "depression", I really didn't have much hope of winning, though I talked bravely and glibly of its being "in the bag".

My opponents were old campaigners with well oiled machinery to use. We were greenhorns, blundering along with nothing much but an objective.

One of my opponents had been the "sitting" member for about fourteen years and was well-entrenched, while I was comparatively unknown.

After listening to the speeches delivered during my first

Session, I was inspired to write the following atrocity. It may be rather awful stuff, but it expresses my feelings at that time. Here it is:—

“There were speakers young and speakers old,
Speakers timid, speakers bold;
Speakers lengthy and speakers terse,
And speakers bad and speakers worse.

There were speakers rapid and speakers dawdlin’,
And speakers vapid and speakers maudlin’,
Speakers mournful and speakers happy,
And speakers trite and speakers sappy.

Of all these kinds there were too many;
But speakers good? — There just weren’t any.”

But this is a little ahead of the story. I haven’t even won the election yet. But after all it isn’t the winning or losing of a battle that matters much. It’s the way you fought it.

Of course, there were the usual “incidents” that you encounter in every election. I remember one such incident at a small town in which I had to speak. Our head organisation had graciously granted me the services of a well known orator from Calgary. The only outside speaker, by the way, that I had to assist me in the campaign.

The meeting was held in the dining room of the hotel, and it was crowded to the doors.

☉ The hotel proprietor happened to be a rather rabid supporter of the Opposition, and had only rented us the hall under protest, and for the sake of the monetary advantage and the extra trade he would get in his beer parlour.

During the evening he completely drowned his sorrows in his own beer, and decided that he had betrayed his Party by letting us in there, and hunted around for a means to salve his conscience. Eventually he found a way out and staggered upstairs to the closet where all the light switches were concentrated, pulled them all, locked himself in, and promptly went to sleep.

The great man was in the middle of his oration when the lights went out, but, being an old campaigner, went right on to the end, and we sat in the dark and listened. When he finished, instead of giving the opposition a chance to heckle, he said something like this: "Ladies and Gentlemen, it is customary to have a question period at these meetings, but seeing that the Opposition have been so discourteous as to turn out the lights, we will now conclude the meeting with the National Anthem. "God save our Gracious King . . ."

Unfortunately, though he was a great orator, he was a most atrocious vocalist, and he started in completely off-key and the rendition of "The King" was the worst I have ever heard.

There was a near riot when the opposition found themselves deprived of their chance to heckle, but beyond an odd black eye and a few bloody noses, no harm was done.

The campaign went on its hectic way until the final day when votes would be counted and I'd know whether I could sink back into peace and obscurity, or have to get back into the thick of things and battle it out.

I don't know now which I really wanted. Nobody likes to be beaten, but on the other hand victory brings duties and problems from which a timid man rather shrinks.

I don't think the result was ever in serious doubt, though

I couldn't see it. If the candidate had been anybody else I expect I would have been enthusiastically optimistic, but somehow I couldn't see myself in the role, and sometimes I was even scared at the thought of winning.

If I had known at the time that the campaign was just a mild zephyr compared to the storm that would be raised by the shock our victory would cause, though I suppose I would have gone through with it, I certainly wouldn't have been happy about it.

Maybe I was—and still am a bit of a moral coward, but this kind of thing was all so different from anything I had experienced or thought of, that even now after about twelve years of it I still do a little private shivering at the thought of what I have got myself into. However, once in the fight, I have never, except momentarily, regretted it or thought of turning back.

The time will soon come when I can step aside for a younger man and look on from the sidelines, but, until that time comes, though I sometimes do a lot of grouching, I know I'm really going to enjoy myself.



Spasm Twenty-three

THE HORRORS OF VICTORY

Possibly this election was not much different from hundreds of others that have preceded it, and probably most of my readers have endured enough of them to be heartily fed up with the subject.

As far as I am concerned, there are two reasons why this particular election was unique and history-making.

First of all, I was in it up to my neck. As far as our constituency was concerned, I was IT.

It seemed strange that some thousands of people should travel miles and go to no end of trouble and inconvenience to see that I was elected, and some thousands should go through the same antics to make sure I wasn't.

I was, in a manner of speaking (I don't like that phrase but it's the best I can think of) the centre of a miniature cyclone (a cyclone is a strong wind that goes round and round and doesn't know where it's heading), and like the centre of other cyclones I think I was the calmest part of the whole storm.

I don't mean that I wasn't interested. I was. But somehow I couldn't get really excited about it, and couldn't muster up even the tiniest worry over the result.

The second reason why this particular election was unique was that it was the first in the history of the world

where Social Credit had been made the main issue. The significance of this may not be apparent yet, but I venture to prophesy that, in time, when the full import of the principles of Social Credit are understood and implemented, it will be hailed as at least as important as the advent of the defunct League of Nations or the moribund U.N.O.

I was glad when the campaign came to an end because I could relax and quit running up and down the country making speeches. Of course, they were very good speeches, but one gets tired of making even good speeches in time. Even Demosthenes must have got slightly sick of himself at times.

I had serious doubts about the result as the odds seemed too great against us, but I felt that, at the worst I could go back to being an "expert" farmer again, dish out agricultural advice to my less intelligent, but more hard-working neighbours, and forget the whole affair.

And in the event of my winning? I failed to realize at the time what a complete change it would make in our lives, so didn't worry about it. I had an idea that "the member" just strolled up to the Legislature once a year, helped to pass a number of unnecessary Bills, whose value was generally in the "nuisance" class, voted certain sums of money for some purpose unknown to the public, and then came back and minded his own business for the rest of the year.

The actual truth turned out to be that the Session was the least arduous part of the work and was really just a pleasant interlude in the general grind. I don't know if we were the first people who took our responsibilities seriously, or if none of us had realized up till then that a Member was actually a servant of the people 365 days in the year. Never

having seen our Member I had figured that his holiday in Edmonton was his sole contribution to the welfare of our country. I expect though that I was wrong (I have been occasionally), and that he was just as busy as I have been since. I think that what helps to fool the people is that a Member is not paid a salary. He is paid so much every Session as an indemnity for having to leave home (funny, isn't it?) and his business for a couple of months each year so that he can make and listen to speeches. If he is inconsiderate enough to die, or for some other equally trivial excuse, is unable to attend the Session, he just doesn't get paid.

After I realized this, I took much better care of my health between Sessions than I had before. I just couldn't afford to drop off just BEFORE a Session. After the Session, and I had received my "Indemnity" I could take my hair down so to speak and do a little splurging—until the bank manager sent me a polite note informing me that my account was slightly overdrawn and would I please attend to it at my earliest convenience. After which I would get cautious again and watch my blood pressure and a few other odds and ends.

It didn't take me long to realize that being the Member was the least part of my duties. Overnight I became the banker, undertaker, divorce court ameliorator, matrimonial agent, scavenger, legal and spiritual adviser, and general kitchen maid for the whole constituency,—and later on for a lot of other constituencies as well.

I'm not complaining. I've enjoyed it all. There is nothing in this world so exhilarating as minding other people's business.

The people who pride themselves on the alleged fact

that they "mind their own business" are generally poor sticks who don't really make a success of doing even that.

I know this statement contradicts something or other that I said in an earlier spasm but if a man can't go through life without contradicting himself now and then life wouldn't be worth living.

Of course, one can overdo it, but there should be somewhere a happy medium between being a meddlesome bore and an isolationist.

I was too busy minding the business of those who actually wanted me to butt in, to bother to stick my nose in where it wasn't wanted, so avoided the temptation to meddle in places where meddling would have meant muddling.

Eventually it came to the day before the election. I was due to make my final speech at Oylen, our headquarters, on the final evening, and then drive back home (about sixty miles) so that we could go another ten miles south to register our votes in the morning. I don't think that last meeting, crowded, enthusiastic and hectic as it was, really made much difference as to the result. Possibly my charming personality may have won over a few extra votes, but most of the people had already decided what they wanted, and had only come to let off a little steam.

The meeting was expected and had to take place so we went through with it, and about two o'clock in the morning crawled back to the hotel for a few hours sleep. In passing I just want to comment on the fact that this particular hotel was owned and run by a very devout Jew, and, in spite of all the propaganda (possibly true) about Jews, I found him to be one of the swellest fellows I had ever met.

At six a.m. (an unearthly hour) we had to be up and off

again, and arrived home in time for breakfast, and off again to register our votes at a rural schoolhouse, which, by the way, was a hotbed of the opposition forces. From there we had to drive to Youngstown (my home town) another twenty miles, just to put in an appearance and assure the people that I was still alive.

Being English born, I had some queer doubts as to whether it would be actually "cricket" to vote for myself or whether I should vote for the other fellow, but finally decided that, in loyalty to my supporters I had better put the cross against my own name.

After lunch we started back to Oyen to be at headquarters to hear the returns come in. We figured we would be in plenty of time, but we figured wrong.

We got about half way, and were sailing along comfortably, nicely dressed for the occasion in our very best, when we came to a road allowance that was three miles long and being ploughed up very efficiently, was consequently practically impassable. As it was the only road I could take, I started down it, and promptly got stuck. My wife decided that her best plan was to get out and cross the fields and wait for me at the end of the road. I have a sneaking idea that the language I was using had something to do with the decision. As I have stated, this being a special occasion she was dressed appropriately in a spotless white dress. When I eventually met her at the other end, her dress was no longer spotless for what the dust hadn't done to ruin her "get-up" the barbed wire had finished. She was a sorry sight. I was in no better shape. I had spent some of the time under the car, some in the ditches and the balance shovelling huge clods of earth out of my way.

I did somehow get through and went on, much to the

disgust of the road gang, who, incidently, belonged to one of the opposition parties, and who had, by a strange coincidence, chosen this day to tear up the road. I understand that after I got through they all quit and went home.

In consequence of this delay, we reached Oyen an hour or two after the returns had started to come in. We were tired, dirty and bedraggled, and wanted nothing more than to sneak into the hotel and get a general clean-up, but no sooner did we hit the main street than we were surrounded and almost swamped by a delirious and cheering mob. It appeared that I was already piling up such a huge majority that the opposition was already practically out of the running.

I did, after a time, get my wife to the hotel so that she could do the mysterious things women can do to come up spruce and smiling under any circumstances, but I never got a chance to get anywhere but the committee rooms until late that night.

The place was a regular bedlam as the results came pouring in, and after the result was assured, it took me half an hour to get the lipstick off my face.

After this my wife and I were escorted from home to home "just for a cup of tea". I do like an occasional cup of tea, but I've been allergic to the island of Ceylon ever since that night. By the time I got back to the hotel I felt as if I had been submerged in tea. Even at that I was in better shape than some. They had also been submerged—but not in tea.

It was a wild night, but in a way the circumstances warranted the celebration. It was perhaps the most complete victory that any political party—and we had become just that whether we liked it or not—had ever accomplished.

The former government had been wiped out to a man, and the only opposition left consisted of three lonely Liberals and three Conservative derelicts, all from the two main cities.

I think the result was a complete shock to everyone. The government party had completely misjudged public opinion and were confident of victory; the Liberal Party, owing to a manipulated scandal linked with the Farmer Government, had hoped to wipe them out and take their place, and even the Conservatives, for some weird and unexplained reason, hoped that in the confusion they might sneak in undetected.

Any of these things might have happened if it had not been for the impertinent interference of William Aberhart, the upstart school teacher.

If the result was a shock to others, it was a knock-out to me. Yesterday I had been an "expert" farmer who didn't farm—today I was an exalted Member of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta—and what to do with the beastly thing was more than I could work out in my own mind.

I am perfectly aware that this was entirely the wrong attitude to take. I should immediately have been filled with a sense of the responsibility of my position, but the fact remained that I just wasn't. Unfortunately, even after about twelve years of it, I still haven't got it. Perhaps that's why I'm still a Nobody, but after having seen some others who DID have that awful sense, I can't work up much regret that I have missed out on it. I have managed to do the job somehow, and get a bang out of it. Going along from day to day I've somehow managed to give a helping hand here and there, and that's about the height of my ambition.

I know heroes and statesmen are not made of that kind of stuff, but I've never had any ambition to be either. Heroes

always get it in the neck, and statesmen are so closely allied to politicians that it is sometimes hard to tell the difference.

Having been duly elected as a Member-of-the-Alberta-Legislative-Assembly (what a mouthfull), the next incident was a call to Calgary to attend the first caucus of the Members.

It was not a very momentous occasion, but it gave me an opportunity to meet and size up the other 56 innocent lambs who had stuck out their necks. This sounds almost irreverent, but at that time I think that is just what most of us felt. Looking back, I feel that, from the top down, the most of us had hoped at the best that we would form His Majesty's Loyal Opposition, and were quite unprepared for the shock of finding that we had to form a government. Possibly I am crediting the rest of them with too much modesty—or timidity—in this statement, but that is what I felt, and got the impression that the others were as bewildered as I was.

I was in a way rather disappointed with the personnel, and at the same time relieved to find that—with a few exceptions who have since disappeared—the bulk of them were just as ordinary as I was.

I was disappointed because I had come to the caucus in fear and trembling, expecting to meet a lot of very superior beings whom I would have to treat with reverence and awe, only to find that most of them were just as scared of me as I was of them.

I was relieved because I found that—with the few exceptions mentioned—they were just a bunch of ordinary intelligent people such as I had been meeting all my life. They were the common run-of-the-orchard people who were determined that the stupidity of the political and economic

muddle we were in should be straightened out, at least as far as Alberta was concerned. On further acquaintance with these very ordinary men, and the two above the average women who made up our number, I have come to the conclusion that the business of government, whether provincial, national or international, could be a lot better conducted by just ordinary people with common-sense than by the so-called experts.

Sounds like a rather stupid statement, but I have ample evidence to back it up.

I repeat, we were just ordinary common-place people, and most of us still are, and yet Alberta is credited all over the American continent, and a lot of other places as well, as having not only the most honest, but also the most efficient and businesslike government in Canada, and perhaps the world, today.

I am writing this, not with the idea of boosting our particular government, but with the definite purpose of getting the ordinary average people to realize that THEY, in their ordinaryness and averageness, instead of wasting their time and talents in a false hero-worship of a lot of spell-binders, can do just what we have done, because they are just the same kind of people as ourselves.

At this preliminary caucus several rough edges were ironed out; Aberhart was formally nominated as our leader, and proceeded to form his Cabinet. In this he made a few mistakes, which he rectified later. These mistakes were quite natural. He did not really know any of us, and being a school teacher there was a definite limit to his knowledge of the frailties of human nature outside the schoolroom.

I was not one of his mistakes.

Why didn't he put me in his Cabinet? That's just where

he showed his common-sense. I am not built that way, and thank goodness, he knew it.

I have since come to realize some of the aches and pains of the Cabinet Minister's job, of their responsibilities and their restrictions, and my early impression that they had something I definitely didn't want has been confirmed as time marched on. They are "fenced in" in a way I just couldn't stand.

I much prefer to stay outside and criticize. It's a joyous and irresponsible job.

Spasm Twenty-four

DEBATE ON THE ADDRESS

After the preliminary caucus, realizing that there would be no official duties to perform until the regular annual Session which was some months away I decided that we would take a well-earned rest (how I love that phrase!). We decided that we would start the rest cure with a brief week-end visit to some friends in a more or less isolated spot in the southeastern part of the constituency.

Acadia Valley is a rather peculiar community. It is off the main line and can only be reached from anywhere else in Alberta by truck or car. Horses and buggies are scarce down there. It is true that there is a railroad which connects with the east.

We merely intended to spend a week-end there so as to play the isolationist game for a couple of days, but the week-end lasted three weeks, and as for isolation—a U.S. tub-thumping politician couldn't have made a better job of it.

We started out in perfect Alberta Fall weather. The sun was shining and everything was balmy—including ourselves. We were togged in near-summer clothing and we mooned along the trail, admiring the scenery, the sunshine and ourselves (chiefly the last).

With the exception of a couple of flat tires, a strike on

the part of the carburetter, and getting the exhaust clogged, we had an uneventful journey.

We did have a pleasant week-end, but when we got up on Monday morning with the idea of mooning home again, conditions had changed slightly. There was a howling blizzard blowing, the roads were blocked with snow in drifts ten feet high, and our near-summer clothing made us feel as if we were enthusiastic members of a nudist colony.

We made a few abortive attempts to start the car, but it was hopeless from the beginning, and we just had to resign ourselves to our fate. We tried to think of ourselves as martyrs, but somehow couldn't manage it. Our friends were of the genuine variety (rather rare) and we KNEW we were welcome, so there was no difficulty on that score.

With a set of bob-sleighs and a team of horses we managed to visit all the neighbours within a reasonable distance, and enjoyed ourselves thoroughly. Being a more or less isolated community, the inhabitants were not unduly impressed with the fact that I was an M.L.A. and treated us as just ordinary human beings. That was nice.

Now I must tell you about the railway. Some years ago, some ambitious railway company had conceived the idea of building a railroad from somewhere in the east, going through Acadia Valley and ending up somewhere in or near the Pacific Ocean. I don't know where they started, but I do know where they ended. It was Acadia Valley. Whether their money ran out, or some politicians interfered, or they just got tired, I don't know. Probably it "was not in the public interest to divulge the information." All I know is that Acadia Valley was the end of the dream.

The scheme was not an entire failure. Trains—of a sort—did meander into the Valley once every two weeks.

Why they did I shall probably never know. Possibly it was in the interest of a "Full Employment" programme, though Socialism wasn't then as rampant as it is now.

The train had left the day we got there so there was no chance to board it for two weeks, and despite ourselves and our consciences, we just had to enjoy ourselves for a time.

But we found that, though our car was stalled for the winter, we could eventually get home by this train. True, it didn't go anywhere near Alberta or our home town, still it did go somewhere, and if we could get somewhere, we could get home from there. We found that by travelling half way through Saskatchewan we could connect with a train that actually went somewhere. When I say somewhere I, of course, mean West. Going East is going back, so that isn't somewhere, is it?

When the two weeks were over, we went to the depot to take a look at the train. It was not an inspiring sight. There were a few dilapidated freight cars, just to balance the contraption, and one long mis-named passenger car. This passenger car was evidently a relic of the early days when the "Colonists" were herded west by a benevolent railroad company who were in cahoots with certain eastern businessmen who were so jealous of eastern "culture" that they bundled all less desirable characters into cars that had been condemned as unfit for cattle, and hurried them out of their sacred territory as quickly as possible.

It was a long car with one alleged heating stove at one end. We took it in turns to visit it at stated intervals to thaw out.

Going through Saskatchewan was not an inspiring experience. Saskatchewan may be a wonderful country with

marvellous scenic effects. We didn't see them. The snow drifts reached unbelievable heights and we couldn't see over them.

We eventually arrived at a small town about half way through Saskatchewan, where we were supposed to make connections that would take us back to civilization.

I don't know how far we had travelled—or crawled, but it had taken us a whole long and frigid day to get there, and it was a treat to get thawed out and see something besides snow for a change.

A lot of people like snow. I don't. I know I can't do anything about it, but I resent it just the same. Poets sit in nice warm cozy rooms and write reams and reams of drivel about the purity of the undriven snow, but if I could shove some of them out into the middle of a snow drift it would soon freeze their enthusiasm. They rave about the purity of snow. I suppose unsullied purity is something to be admired—at a distance, but it's frightfully inhuman and deadly monotonous. Personally, I like a little colour—even if it's red.

I have occasionally met people who were, presumably—according to their own account—pure and unsullied, but, while not doubting their purity, I found them distressingly chilly. No, I don't like snow.

After much trial, tribulation and discomfort, we got back home to recuperate from the effects of our vacation.

I have noticed that this is what most people have to do. They take a vacation to "rest" from the effects of their alleged "work", and then have to spend a stated period to "rest" from the effects of their "rest".

My own idea of a rest—and this may seem revolutionary—is to rest. I consider myself an expert on the subject,

so I hope the reader will not ignore this opinion. It is the result of years of experience. It is a rule I have followed rigidly and, in consequence, I have lived a lot longer than a lot of people expected—or hoped.

The next excitement was the first Session of the newly formed Social Credit Government. That was slated for the latter part of January, 1936. That meant, of course, I had to go to Edmonton, the Capital city, and enter into a new life and mix with a new class of society, and get mixed up in affairs to which I was an entire stranger.

It also meant that I had, that first year, to leave my family behind. I didn't like this. We had always, with the exception of the four years or so when I was "saving Canada for Democracy", and making rather a mess of the job, always lived our lives together in so many ways. I don't mean that we had just existed together. Somehow all our lives were so intertwined that when one was absent for any length of time it was almost like an amputation.

However, it had to be, and I went forth and braved the unknown, though with fear and trembling.

The Edmonton of those days was not a very imposing city. It had grown by fits and starts (apparently more by fits than starts), and the business section was spotted with imposing buildings separated by unsightly hovels and shacks that were a relic of the old homesteading days. It has improved vastly in the last few years, owing to the queer prosperity that bloody war seems to bring about, but it is still somewhat of an anomaly.

I could write a whole book on that subject also, but it wouldn't be popular.

My first experience was that of being "sworn in". This

took place in the rooms of the Lieutenant-Governor in the Parliament Building.

The Lieutenant-Governor of those days was, by the way, a very pleasant, genial gentleman who was far more human and unassuming than the "Aides" who surrounded and smothered him.

Having been duly "sworn in" we were summoned to attend the first opening of parliament.

This was a very elaborate affair, but, due to some kink in my make-up, failed to impress me as it should have done. The pomp and ceremony were all there, and to a lot of normal people the whole thing was rather impressive, but somehow during my irregular and unorthodox life I had acquired an unfortunate faculty of seeing predominantly the funny side of things, and the sight of these little people strutting up and down and round about performing their queer antics, roused a most unbecoming risibility in my irreverent nature.

I have since realized that all this ceremonious pomp was merely following out certain traditions, and perhaps in these days when we have all become dull and rather stupid realists, these traditions, futile as they seem, are playing a very vital part in keeping us in balance.

Since then I have taken a small part in several "openings", and though I still think they are rather funny, I am more sympathetic to their idiosyncracies than I was.

I have now been "sworn in" three times, and sworn at times innumerable, and am somewhat inured to both.

Having got over the "Opening" we got down to business (more or less). This was rather a distressing business. Alberta had become a Province in 1905, and since that time various administrations had managed to put the province

in debt to the tune of over a hundred and sixty million dollars, on which the people (you and I) were paying a nice fat rate of interest. There was nothing unusual or—according to orthodox ideas—wrong or criminal in this. It had always been done, and always would be done and “to heck” with the consequences!

It was considered necessary and “sound” for all governments to run the country’s business on a system of growing debt on which the people, through taxation, paid out huge sums in annual interest. Of course, the political party in office was not interested in the final results. All they wanted was to give the people the services they demanded, regardless of the bill that would have to be paid by future generations.

Up until the ~~time our~~ ~~freak~~ economists arrived on the scene, all this was considered quite the right thing to do. It is true that a few people realized that some day, though the actual debt would never have to be—nor indeed allowed to be—paid, yet in time the interest or usury would absorb about ninety per cent of the taxpayers pocket money, but the realisation of that catastrophe seemed so far off that nobody bothered about it very much.

It is a remarkable thing about governments that they can carry on the country’s business under principles that, in private life, would not only be condemned as unethical, but would soon bring the private business into bankruptcy.

However, this is not a treatise on political economy so I’ll get on with my real job.

The result of this debt policy had left Alberta in an unholy mess, and when the Aberhart government took over we found that, not only our credit had been exhausted, but that the Treasury had been scraped to the very bottom, and

there wasn't enough money to pay even the salaries of the Civil Servants.

Somehow or other we got over this initial difficulty, and the ship of State went sailing on. It was a bit wobbly for a time, but eventually straightened out.

Our first embarrassment was our complete ignorance of "Parliamentary Procedure". And those two words contain more nonsense than any other two in the entire English language. I think I have mentioned that none of us had ever been mixed up (a good phrase) in politics before. Most of us had never seen the inside of a Legislative Assembly, and it was all rather awe-inspiring at first.

To make matters worse, the Opposition were mostly old hands at the game. Most of them were lawyers, and what lawyers can't do to make you feel cheap and insignificant isn't worth doing, and these particular lawyers knew all the tricks of the game. Tricks is the right word. There are more tricks in party politics than there are in a deck of cards. I think at first most of us were really scared of them. I remember, after my first day in the House, wondering how I'd ever muster up the "gall" to make a speech among such a bunch of critics.

Fortunately, when the occasion arose to make my "maiden speech", it came so suddenly that I didn't have time to get the jitters.

According to this same "Parliamentary Procedure", the Session always starts with "The Speech from the Throne", which is read by the Lieutenant-Governor.

The title is just a polite fiction. As a matter of plain fact the Throne has practically nothing to do with it, and sometimes privately disapproves of the whole business. However, the Throne has to read it anyway, and having read it, dis-

appears from the scene until the end of the Session. The "Speech" is merely an indication of what the government in office thinks—or tries to make others think—it is going to do during the Session.

Then comes "The Reply to the Speech from the Throne". This sounds simple, but really it takes most of the Members on both sides of the House to accomplish it. It starts out with two Members on the government side of the House moving and seconding it, and then the avalanche starts.

These two are followed by a seemingly endless procession of speeches from members of both sides of the House. The government members naturally tell the world what a wonderful programme the government has outlined, and the Opposition gleefully tear it to pieces as the most outrageous legislation ever proposed.

What amused me then, and amuses me more than ever now, is the almost invariable formula they have to go through to get started.

First of all they seem to start with the words, "As I rise to take part in this debate". Then it seems to be an absolute necessity that they "congratulate all the previous speakers" on the excellence of their addresses, regardless of the fact that most of the speeches have been (with the exception of mine) painful to hear. After this preliminary, they one and all spend ten or fifteen minutes in telling everybody what a wonderful constituency they represent. They seem to think that if they didn't do this their constituents would never elect them again. As a matter of fact their constituents have far more common-sense than they have, and would think far more of them if they would get down to business.

They sometimes vary their opening remarks by telling us that—"I had no intention of taking part in this debate

but—", in spite of the fact that they had spent days and reams of paper in preparing the speech.

This kind of thing goes on for endless days. The speeches don't really make the slightest difference to the programme laid down by the government, but it is something that has to be gone through.

At first I used to wonder why we had to have this endurance test, but later discovered that we had to keep talking because "The Budget" was not yet ready, and no real business could be done until we had voted His Majesty certain sums of money (which we didn't know how on earth we were going to get hold of) with which to carry on the business of the Firm.

And so, until the Budget is ready, we just HAVE to go on talking until the signal comes that "the Budget is ready".

That is how I came to make my "maiden speech". "The Whip" (I'll tell you all the grisly details about this creature later) had arranged for certain speakers for the afternoon debate. Unfortunately two of the speakers had suddenly developed a disease almost unknown in parliamentary circles. This was an attack of "Inferiority Complex", which made them cut their speeches so short that we were twenty minutes shy on the afternoon programme.

In this emergency he sent me a hurried note demanding that I fill the gap. Well I did. I got up and talked. What I said I don't know to this day. All I know is that during the whole twenty minutes I said absolutely nothing that had even the remotest connection with the Throne Speech, and I have a sneaking idea that for this reason the Speaker was so entranced that he forgot to call me to order.

Anyway, I got away with it, and it showed again that an unprepared speech is sometimes the best speech. Since

then I have made a lot of speeches (may I be forgiven!) and haven't prepared any of them. They may not have been very good speeches, but the method has saved me a lot of work and worry.

Then came the Budget. The Budget is considered to be the most important part of the legislation because it deals with dollars and cents, and nothing could quite equal that in importance.

The truth is that the Minister of Finance—or in our case, the Provincial Treasurer—aided by his department, makes a guess as to how much revenue he will be able to snipe from the people (other provinces borrow this), and how much he will have to pay out during the year. It seems to be a kind of bet. He bets that he can do it on so much, and the Opposition bets he can't.

He generally wins because he holds all the cards.

The debate starts with the Provincial Treasurer making what might be loosely termed a speech. It isn't my idea of a speech, but everybody pretends to be intensely interested.

All the members lean forward in their seats and listen breathlessly while he pours out astronomical figures. Some of them make notes, which they afterwards surreptitiously dump in the waste paper basket, some nod their heads in solemn approval and some scowl. From what I have found out since, hardly one of them knows any more about what it means than I do, but they have to put on an act to satisfy "their public".

I have never been interested in figures—not those kind of figures anyway. My knowledge of mathematics ends at the multiplication of two by two, and now, later in life I'm not even sure of the answer to that. However, I tried to emulate the others, in an appearance of profound interest,

and would have got away with it but for the unfortunate fact that I let out a sonorous snore in the middle of it.

After the Provincial Treasurer finished and sat down amid thunderous applause, the speech-making started up all over again. All those who had made speeches on the "Throne Speech", were so enamoured of the exuberance of their own verbosity that they had to do it all over again, either in support of, or opposition to "The Budget", and those who had generously refrained from speaking on the first, yielded to temptation and made up for lost time on the second. I can't claim any particular virtue for refraining in this instance. The truth was that I knew so little of what it was all about that I was scared to show my ignorance. I have found out since that ignorance of the subject is rather an asset than otherwise in speech-making, and that had I been less timid I might have made a name for myself as an orator—or something.

If you doubt me, read any copy of the Hansard of the Federal Government and you'll know what I mean.

After everyone had said all they could think up about the Budget, the blamed thing was passed and the Government assured that—if they could get it—they were welcome to so many million dollars for the year.

From then on the business was more or less routine. We found that, when the estimates "came down" all we could do to them was to pass them "as is" or move that certain items "be not spent". We couldn't add to them or switch them so we just passed them after talking about them. We passed a lot of Bills, which would probably be amended at the next Session, and wound up the Session. It had taken us over two months, and if it hadn't been for the speeches, we could have been home in three weeks.

Spasm Twenty-five

THE RED TAPE PEOPLE

This, my first Session, and my first initiation into the weird contortions of Parliamentary Procedure, and the weirder antics of the politicians, had been a rather exhilarating experience and had left me gasping and bewildered. I had never dreamed for a minute that any such big business as administering a whole province could be conducted in such an extraordinary manner.

I have found out since that we were models of business efficiency compared to the freakishness that is exhibited in the House of Commons in Ottawa and elsewhere.

I learned a lot during that first Session, though there is a lot that I'm not sure I wouldn't unlearn if I could.

Anyway, I was glad when it was over and I could return to my family and my dog, and, as I fondly hoped, relax.

I have always hoped that some day I would really own a dog, and have procured at different times a lot of nice looking pups of all breeds, and some of no breed at all, in the hope that some day I would eventually have one that I felt I would really own. I have never succeeded. Before I have had the wretched creature a few weeks, he always owned me body and soul, and dictated to me as Hitler would never have dared to do.

I used to rather fancy myself as a dog trainer, but it was

merely conceit on my part. I was always the one who got the training. I know this is a weakness, but it must be inherent. There is something about the kind of dog that I like that gets me. I would procure a pup that would look at me with soft pleading eyes and I would say to myself, "Here at last is a dog that I can actually boss," and before long I would find him to be just as adamant a tyrant as any of the others I have "trained". I have always loved dogs, and now that I am mixed up in politics I love and respect them more than ever.

As pups, their utter irresponsibility appeals to something that is, I suppose, reprehensible in my nature. Maybe it's the "fellow feeling" that "makes us wondrous kind", but anyway the result is always the same. By the time I have got round to training him (it's always a him—I have never had the gall to try training a "her"), he has always got the upper hand and I find myself in the position of the "trainee". From then on I'm not much more than a willing slave.

My latest attempt to "own" a dog has been the most dismal failure of the lot. He is a Scottie whom, for some unknown reason, I named "Tuppence". He has a decided will of his own, has a superiority complex, and has very definite ideas as to how to bring me up in the way I should go.

He knows everything that is to be known, and has no hesitation in telling me just what he thinks of me. He is fond of me in a motherly kind of way, and follows me around wherever I go, but it is more with the idea of keeping an eye on me and seeing that I don't get into mischief than anything else. He is, too, as inquisitive as an income tax investigator. But in spite of these little failings, after being immersed in politics for two months, it was a treat to get

back to the clean and decent—if somewhat painful honesty of “Tuppence”.

I tried to tell him of my experiences, but got nothing but a sniff of incredulity. Even his cynical contempt for the wisdom of humanity could not quite swallow the stories I told him of what went on in the House.

I thought I was coming back home to “relax”, (my favourite occupation), but I soon found that my constituents had other ideas. This was the time of that ridiculous “depression” and the word “relief” seemed to be about the only word left in the English language. There was farm relief, seed and feed relief, indigent relief, and several other kinds of human “relief”. I seemed to be the only one who couldn’t get any relief from “relief”.

I was simply deluged with delegations demanding relief in some form or other.

To one who had been accustomed to the cheeky, hell-for-leather independence of the cowpuncher days, this was a distinct shock, but I soon realized that times had changed. The East had moved west, finance had taken charge and the old days of the free and easy helpfulness between neighbours was gone, and a kind of sham government paternalism, which was just the faint beginning of the bureaucracy that afflicts us today, had taken its place.

The result had a distinctly unhealthy influence on the people, but seemed inevitable.

The consequence to me was that, instead of “relaxing” I found myself in a regular whirlwind of complaints, demands, and pleadings from a people who had been overwhelmed by the poverty, destitution and unsolvable problems that this sham man-made depression had brought about.

I think this was the most depressing period of my whole life. I had to witness the transformation and degradation of a free, independent and kindly people into slaves of a foul unchristian economic system that left them almost grovelling to bureaucracies for food and clothing to keep their families alive.

I had to watch the younger generation degenerating from the healthy care-free young animals that they had been, into bums and hoboes, tramping the trails and riding the box cars looking for jobs that didn't exist, and eventually giving up the struggle and settling down into hopeless "unemployables" with no initiative and no ambition except to drag out a dreary lifeless existence as best they could.

It was so saddening and disillusioning that I prefer not to dwell upon it.

Its painful consequences are still with us, and perhaps more apparent today than ever. I could write reams about the cause and effect of this totally unnecessary beastliness that was forced on us.

Anyway, after a time a "kindly" war came along and brought back at least a temporary prosperity, and our younger generation could be fed and clothed again and actually given a "job".

William Aberhart had often spoken of the stupidity of "poverty amidst plenty" and been jeered at for his pains, but the full import of his words was being felt, and the disastrous results of the madness were being brought about.

Canada, one of Earth's richest countries (I'm not talking about bits of paper), and Alberta, one of Canada's richest provinces, with practically everything to make its citizens "healthy, wealthy and wise", was absurdly faced with the problem of saving its people from actual starvation, while

surrounded within our own borders with almost unimaginable wealth.

Of course, the whole thing is absolute lunacy, but lunacy is something with which you can't reason. Some day perhaps the people will realise the spiritual and mental blindness of their leaders, and will refuse to follow them into the ditch.

When I started on this subject, I merely wanted to explain my own personal problems, but again got off the track.

All these individual and community problems made it necessary to take many flying trips to the Capital City, and interview Cabinet Ministers, Deputies and a host of Civil Servants. I didn't mind the Cabinet Ministers so much. I had known some of them before they were "elevated" (sounds like being hanged, doesn't it?) and knew them to be quite human. In fact, I might have echoed Charles Wesley's ejaculation on seeing a man going to the gallows; I might have said "There, but for the grace of God, goes N. B. James."

The Deputies were a different proposition. They knew it all, and didn't forget to let us know. They were rather awe inspiring creatures. When you went to them with a problem they would immediately call for "the Files", and when "the Files" came they always proved that you didn't know what you were talking about, and that you were simply wasting the time of very superior beings (the Deputies) and that if you would just go home and mind your own business the State would be that much better off.

We blame Orders-in-Council for the Bureaucracy that is engulfing us today, but it is really "the Files". They have swamped the Deputies themselves.

The Cabinet Ministers themselves were green to the job, and overwhelmed with their sense of responsibility and their knowledge of absence of knowledge, and had to rely more than was healthy on the advice and information (sometimes MISinformation) given them by their Deputies (and the Files). The Deputies were slightly hostile, frankly suspicious, and also a bit scared of their jobs. The last named condition was perhaps what saved the day.

To them we were fanatical interlopers who were going to turn things upside down and turn the rut into a highway, and they shrunk from the draughts from which they would have to shield themselves.

Many of them had been on the job for years, had served under (or over) previous administrations, and had got into a rut so deep that they couldn't (and didn't want to) see over the top. Anything new or contrary to routine was abhorrent to them.

They weren't, on the whole, bad men, but were so tied hand and foot by red tape and precedent that it had become virtually impossible for them to move except along orthodox departmental grooves that allowed no latitude.

We, on the other hand, did not understand the difficulties under which they laboured. Difficulties for which they were only partially responsible, and which had been brought about by the multiplicity of the Acts that had been passed, amended and re-amended year after year by previous administrations.

There was a mutual distrust and antagonism that rendered it difficult to achieve any co-operation between us. We had immediate and pressing problems to be solved in behalf of the people we served, and we wanted those problems solved immediately, if not sooner, and we couldn't

understand why our demands could not be met, seeing that they would relieve the people we were representing of their distress. We did not realise that these Deputies were just as sympathetic as we were but were held back by the rules, regulations and restrictions that we, or our predecessors had placed upon them, and by "the Files" that ruled their lives, and in which their whole lives were so enmeshed that they couldn't have broken through even if their habits had allowed them.

In time we got to understand them better, and in later years I have found the Civil Servants, though still a wee trifle snobbish, on the whole; a kindly and helpful bunch of very human beings with whom it has been a pleasure to work.

Back at home I found that the relaxation idea was just something to dream about. As a matter of fact, it has been the most strenuous twelve years of my life, and each year has brought more work and responsibility than I relish. How is it that the man who doesn't want work always has work thrust upon him, and the man who is brainless enough to WANT to work can't get a job?

Now I'm beginning to look forward to the approaching time when I can retire and just sag into a pleasant coma and let the busy world go round in dizzy circles and come out where it went in without my help, and I can really relax and smile pleasantly at its antics.

In spite of the fact that I know the utter impossibility of being capably replaced, I am steeling myself against the temptation to carry the world on my shoulders any longer. Even though "after me the deluge"—I WILL rest.

The Session over, I had to start my meetings all over again to tell the people what we had done, and explain why

we had not done some of the things that we were supposed to do.

As I had been doing this kind of thing all my life, the latter came naturally and I got away with it quite comfortably.

I have had a lot of explaining to do for years of the things I have done, but explaining to various interested people the intricate reasons why I have not done certain things that they seemed to think they had a right to expect me to do, has kept me busy and interfered with my peace of mind all my life.

From now on my life was to be, in spite of myself, almost entirely political.

None of us wanted it that way, but that is the way the game of administering the affairs of the country had always been played, and the politicians, and indeed the people themselves at that time, wouldn't have it any other way. The party politicians, of course, didn't know any other alternative, and also were determined, backed by their financial friends, that by hook or by political crook (mostly the latter) we should fail in our efforts to run the affairs of Alberta under Social Credit principles. That is really what political parties are for. Outside of their usefulness to certain financial pressure groups, there doesn't seem to be much reason for their existence, except as a kind of preparatory school for the Senate.

I cannot blame our own pet Opposition much for their antagonism. If we succeeded in our efforts, it would reduce them to the ordinary level of average human beings, or rather raise the average human being slightly over their heads, and that would never do.

And then too, the idea that a country could be run

without going into debt, and that the credit of a nation or a province could be founded on its resources instead of a banker's fountain pen seemed mad, and they could see nothing but ruin in the idea.

At first they feared we would fail and in our failure bring them down to ruin (or so they said). Now their only fear is that we will succeed, and that would be worse still.

The ceaseless party political fight has hampered our efforts considerably, but most of us have somehow managed to keep our first vision and objective before us through it all, and have by that means been able, not only to bring our objective nearer, but meanwhile to give Alberta a much cleaner, saner and more efficient government than if we had succumbed to the political atmosphere around us.

When I attended the first Session, not knowing much about the accommodations to be obtained I had come up alone and stayed at a hotel. In spite of the fact that the accommodations were excellent, I had not been happy and decided that in future I would bring the family with me.

We succeeded in finding comfortable quarters (this was before the Bureau days) in a house not far from the Parliament Buildings, and in spite of politics and a certain amount of polite snubbing by the elite, managed to enjoy ourselves.

The Session of 1937 was a rather momentous one. Having got over the natural nervousness occasioned by an entirely new environment, and finding that the Opposition, instead of being the formidable supermen we had thought them, were really perfectly harmless, and muddle-headed and floundering in a morass of confusion, and entirely unable to cope with a set of crazy people who knew and cared nothing about established shibboleths, and had an objective that had nothing to do with party politics, we

were able to go ahead with our programme, which was, of course, to implement the principles of Social Credit in Alberta.

We formulated certain Acts that would give us the power to use the credit of our people to give these same people the benefit of our production so that they could do away with any serious thought of this ridiculous "depression" that was stultifying the lives of millions, and give them the benefit of the mass of real wealth that they were producing, and which was piling up all around us.

There was no difficulty in passing the Acts. We had an overwhelming majority in the Assembly, and practically all the people at our backs, but that was only the beginning of our difficulties.

It soon appeared that the people didn't know what was good for them, and the Courts and the Federal Government decided in their supreme wisdom (mixed with a few other considerations that shall be nameless) that the province had no power to use their own credit to feed and clothe their own people. That power belonged to the Federal Government, alone, and as the Federal Government either did not care to, or dared not exercise it, well, that was that.

But this is not a parliamentary guide (which generally ends up where it started). I need not weary you with all the details of cheap and nasty party politics. I have had so much of that wretched atmosphere, not only from the Opposition, but I regret to say, from our own deluded Members in the last twelve years that I'm not going to inflict my readers with it.

I just want to issue one warning to my sincere but gullible readers. However sincere your intentions, and however earnest your desire to help the people, DON'T get

into the political field. You may mean well, but the forces around you will be too great for you, and you will find yourself in the end so submerged in political chicanery that you won't be able even to think straight, and the very people you went in with will be the first to betray you.

This was to be my last term as representative of a rural constituency, and once again our whole life was to be changed.

Before the 1940 election it was decided (goodness only knows by whom) that we had too many members in the House, ("which nobody can deny"). I don't know just what the correct number should be, but judging from my experience and reading the Ottawa Hansard, I think a further drastic reduction would be in order. The fewer Members the fewer speeches. And THAT would be something worthwhile. If speeches were as strictly rationed as sugar, we could get on with the "firm's" business much more efficiently.

We all agree that most of the other fellows are redundant, but unfortunately it is always "the other fellow" whom we want to get banished. We, ourselves, are always indispensable.

Anyway, in the redistribution of Seats, my constituency was wiped out, regardless of the wishes of the inhabitants, and was merged with another neighbouring one, and as I didn't care to compete with another Social Credit Member for the nomination, I retired from the scene.

At least I thought I had retired. It wasn't quite as easy as that though. For some inexplicable reason the people of Edmonton, the Capital City, decided that they wanted me to represent them, and asked me to accept the nomination. Why they wanted me, in spite of the knowledge of my super-wisdom (which by the way, nobody but myself sus-

pects) I don't know, and now some seven years later I think they are beginning to wonder about it themselves.

I think it must have been my winning ways. I know there are several other reasons, but modesty forbids me to mention them!

The 1940 election came on, and though I found contesting a city election, especially under the weird and confusing system of "proportional representation", was a very different thing to fighting a rural one, I managed to win somehow, and once again we had to change our lives and settle down to the comforts, complexities and restrictions of city life.

Spasm Twenty-six

ADVANTAGES OF A BACK-BENCHER

In these later chapters of my recorded life I shall probably be accused of dragging in politics and also stressing unduly the virtues of the Social Credit principles for which I stand. This is not altogether true. It is politics that has done the dragging, and I have merely been the dragee.

I like party politics rather less than you do. In fact I could write a whole treatise on my condemnation of party politics—even my own party politics.

I could dilate on the evils of the game that has been played so long, and which has done so much to degrade real politics to the extent that few people will sully themselves with it.

Party politics has been, either wittingly or unwittingly, the tool directly or indirectly responsible for the insane slaughters and criminal "depressions" that have brought this mad world to the brink of irretrievable disaster.

As for Social Credit,—though I am a fanatical believer in the logic, sanity and simplicity of its philosophy, and believe it is the remedy for the social and economic cancer that has got such a firm grip on us through our present insane economic system—or rather lack of system, yet I have tried my honest best to keep it in the background as much as possible.

But this is supposed to be a more or less truthful account of my life to date, and, much as I hate to confess it, I have been up to my neck during these last few years in politics, until they have become the main part of my life, and I can't give you an account of these later years without dragging in the unpleasant subject to a certain extent.

Social Credit is the reason why I have had to get mixed up in politics for the last fourteen years, so if this is to be a real autobiography (which I sometimes doubt) I just can't avoid these two subjects altogether.

I am beginning to look forward to the time in the near future when I shall be able to return to the healthy normal life of an average human being and breathe clean air again. I hope it will be before I have lost the few remaining illusions of the greatness of the Great.

But meanwhile I have had to carry on, and that has meant many new experiences, some of them pleasant and some distinctly less so.

The change to city life meant, on the one hand, certain comforts and luxuries which were not possible on the farm; comforts and luxuries that, while they perhaps sapped the Spartan endurance that is supposed to be so good for the moral and spiritual courage—of others, and which is so dear to the hearts of certain "good" people (no reference to Toronto intended), yet have some redemptive qualities which some of us weaker people enjoy, and which perhaps make us more tolerant of the weaknesses of others.

Then again I found that, facing an entirely different set of personal problems of urban people had a broadening effect on my perspective that helped me to keep my feet on the ground, and enabled me to retain my title of a "nobody",

instead of being "elevated to the uneasy position of a "Somebody".

This may sound like nonsense, but it isn't. I have watched "back-benchers", both in the House of Commons and in our legislatures who have been "elevated" to the position of Cabinet Ministers, each with his own pet portfolio to hamper and restrict his thinking and to mould his mind into a pattern that is bounded by rules and red tape, and I have found in each case a narrowing of vision and a shrinkage of individual character and independence of thought.

Cabinet Ministers are nice people on the whole. Of course, there are exceptions. I have known of those whom it would be criminal folly to trust with your wallet or your reputation, but they were the exceptions.

But a Cabinet Minister is an awfully responsible creature. As "Ministers of the Crown" they dare not utter a word without carefully weighing it, because every public utterance is supposed to be the utterance of the government as a whole. When a Cabinet Minister sneezes he must sneeze in harmony with his "colleagues", and sometimes if they just sneezed they'd sound a lot more sensible than when they talk.

When a Cabinet Minister utters a single word he has, first of all, to stifle his individuality and speak for the whole blooming government. He daren't make a speech full of the irresponsibilities that make other people's speeches so delightful—sometimes. He has to weigh his words, and the weight of some of them is about on a par with the heaviness of a cold suet pudding.

It must be a horrid thing to have to speak for about a dozen different people at once.

In our particular outfit, we have about eleven different portfolios, each under the supervision of a separate individual. Just imagine having to make a speech for which all these queer mentalities (and a few with none) would have to be responsible.

Just lately in a meeting with this aggregation, together with some less important people, I got a lecture on this subject and found that any one of these making a public utterance, couldn't just speak naturally what was on his alleged mind, but had to include the whole lot.

That is the main result of being "elevated".

Now I, as a mere back-bencher, can go out and, as long as I don't go in for personal libel or slander, can say what I darned well please and be as irresponsible as I like (and that's going a long way) and say things that no Cabinet Minister would dare say—much as he might like to.

By this time, about 1942, the second Act of the World War was well on its way and all activities outside the "war effort" had to be suspended. Mysteriously poverty had disappeared and the "no money" plea was hushed. There was plenty of everything for everybody, including bombs for "foreign markets".

The Communists, and some others, who had at the start denounced the war bitterly as an Imperialist and Capitalistic war, were, now that Germany had attacked Russia, suddenly transformed into Canada's super-Patriots, and anybody who dared to criticise them or their Soviet Masters was branded at once as "subversive" and Fascists.

It was the most unblushing about-face I have ever witnessed, and the most surprising thing about it was that they actually got away with it.

Unfortunately, the results of this clever campaign even

now have not altogether been dissipated, and, though their activities have been exposed from time to time, any criticism of Communism or Sovietism is frowned upon.

By this time we had got used to city life and, though we still missed the freedom and inconveniences of the farm that we had enjoyed for some years, being originally urban in our habits, we soon fell into the routine.

There were just two things that rather irked me. The first was minor, but still rather troublesome. That was the necessity of "living up to my position" in regard to clothes. To have to be correctly dressed before you could stick your nose outside the door was a beastly nuisance at times, but even that I have got more or less used to. What I shall never like is "Banquets".

It seems that every blessed occasion in a city has to have a banquet, and of all the dreary, stupid inflictions we have to endure, the banquet is the most irritating.

Occasionally, though not often, one got a reasonably decent meal at a banquet, though mostly you had to go home afterwards to get filled up, but the price you had to pay was exorbitant. I don't mean the price in dollars and cents. It was the endless speeches to which one had to listen.

It seems that a banquet is nothing but just another meal unless accompanied by speeches.

All speakers commenced their address by stating that their remarks were going to be brief, and then droned on interminably. At first when they came to the words "in conclusion" I used to perk up a bit and think that the speaker really meant he was going to quit, but now I know better. It merely means that he has got his second wind.

An "After Dinner" speaker is rather worse than just a

speaker. The former always has the idea that he has to be "funny", and as most of them are only funny when they don't mean to be, the result is rather painful.

A banquet is only a dreary annoyance when you are allowed to take your place "below the salt", but when, "on account of your position" you are honoured with a seat at "the head table" then it becomes inhuman torture.

There have been times when I have really enjoyed a banquet, but those occasions have been rare, and only when I have been the "guest speaker!"

That kind of thing does alter one's point of view, doesn't it?

I remember one occasion when I was seated at the head table next to a very distinguished lady. She remarked that she hated sitting at the head table because they always placed her next to some "stuffy old man" to whom she couldn't even talk. Although she was sitting next to me, and I'm not young, I couldn't help sympathising with her.

But banquets aren't the only trial that one has to endure in urban life. The problems one meets and is supposed to solve every day are far more complex and varied, as is the daily life, than in the rural districts.

Under this complex and unwieldy "Proportional Representation" system of voting in the two main cities of Alberta, we elect five members "at large" for the whole city. That is to say that, instead of dividing the city into say five constituencies, we each represent the whole city.

This is supposed to be more democratic and give minorities a fairer representation. Maybe it does, but it is amazingly complicated for the poor voter, and in this particular case imposes a hardship on me.

We have two government representatives elected in

Edmonton, one Socialist, one indeterminate "Independent" and one "Indeterminate" (period).

Now, when any one of the hundred and twenty thousand constituents has a problem to solve, from the disposal of a Mother-in-law to the finding of a house to rent, or the best means of dispensing with a husband or wife, to whom do they come?

The three Indeterminates can't help them, and the fourth being the Premier, they can't get near,—so it's me, (ungrammatical but more expressive than I) to whom they have to come.

My own Mother-in-law was such a delightful person that I have never been able to smile even at the worn out jokes about Mothers-in-law, much less tried to get rid of her. I wish she was still with us. And as for the erring husbands or wives, my sympathy often outweighs my judgment.

Then there are the Labour Unions. Although I have always been profoundly sympathetic to the idea of less work for more pay, yet there are some things that the Unions demand that make one gag a little. Some of them are so close to Nazi dictatorship that even a politician hesitates to endorse them.

Then there are the Pressure Groups. The so-called Temperance Forces want prohibition, and the Beverage Dispensers and the Beverage Moppers-up want the opposite. The Teachers' Association want most of the revenue spent on them, and the Motor Association wants it all put into roads. These are just small samples of the complications that go to make up the life of the urban politician. There are others.

Then there is the Press. In the country we didn't bother

much about them, but in the city you have to take them seriously. (They take themselves seriously too.)

There is an awful lot of nonsense talked about "the Freedom of the Press", but as a matter of fact there is no such thing. The Press, with few exceptions, is the most servile slave of political and financial taskmasters that could be imagined. There is hardly an influential paper in Canada today that is not completely controlled by a political party or by—either directly or indirectly—International Finance.

On the other hand I have found, with one or two very rare exceptions, that the reporters are about as swell a bunch of people as one could wish to meet.

They make a precarious living by reporting fairly and efficiently the events that go on, and turn in their reports without prejudice. If their reports happen to coincide with "editorial policy" all well and good, but if not, the final result is so garbled and distorted that there is often little resemblance to actual fact left.

In other cities in Canada the Member leads a less complicated life. Each has his own "ward" or constituency and doesn't have to bother with other parts of the city.

In Edmonton or Calgary it's a complex life that would, I presume (it's only presumption), try a saint.

However, in spite of the complexities, somehow I have managed to enjoy life and get quite a lot of fun out of it.

Soon after the 1940 election I was appointed as Secretary of the Social Credit Board. As Social Credit has been my main objective all through this merry political game, this pleased me, and enabled me to do the work I loved most.

It meant a huge amount of correspondence to and from all over the world, and the sending out of innumerable books and pamphlets (you should read some of them), and

the reading and notating of clippings from newspapers from almost every country in our misnamed civilization, but it gave me some relief from the unhealthy political atmosphere that threatened to stifle me.

Besides this I had to write a whole page every week for "The Canadian Social Crediter", our weekly paper, and for a man who is inherently and fundamentally averse to work of any description, I have really landed myself in a mess, and I'm beginning to think that the sooner I get out of it the better.

Anyway, it's pretty near time I ended this alleged autobiography. That's the trouble with autobiographies. They simply must be incomplete, because they can't really be finished until you die, and it would be horribly disconcerting and disgustingly unorthodox if one sat up in one's coffin with a notebook and dictated the last chapter.

The following years of my political career would be somewhat of a repetition of the last few years, and the reader would not be interested. It has been a fight all the way through, and being a placid individual, it has been a strain. We have taken some mauling, but have, on the whole, made our presence felt by the upholders of the present madhouse economic system, and the muddle that is becoming so apparent even to the dullest intellect, is helping us in these latter years.

We have succeeded in getting over a good deal of sanity to a lot of thoughtful people. In time I feel sure this will bear fruit, and unless the Somebodies have completely wrecked civilization before the truth has made us free, our fight will have been worth while.

But before I close this spasm and this book, I have to record the untimely passing of the great man who was

mainly responsible for the awakening of the people of Alberta, and a vast number of people outside of Alberta, to the utter stupidity of our present financial system, and pointing the way to the simple remedy of Social Credit.

He was the one man, on this continent at least, who had really thrown a good healthy scare into the minds of the international gang of thugs who had been running governments so long, and made them realize the tenuousness of their position once the people knew the truth.

Since then they have resorted to the Dumbarton "Hoaxes" and the Bretton Woods scandal to bolster their position, but in spite of the San Fiasco conference, they are getting pretty wobbly.

He had, because of his fighting qualities, and his organizing ability, been the first threat to their unholy power that they had ever received, and they hated him with an ungodly hatred. They had been used to dealing with sheep, but had run up against a fighting Billy Goat.

After the Session of 1943, William Aberhart, who had been in ill health for some months, left for Vancouver for a rest—and never returned.

Shortly after his arrival there he was taken seriously ill and passed away.

This was a severe blow to thousands who loved him and called him "The Chief", and was a relief and joy to those who feared and hated him.

It will be probably some years before his greatness is recognized, but I believe the time will come when he will be acknowledged to be one of the greatest statesmen Canada has ever known.

Certainly he stood out head and shoulders over the

would-be synthetic statesmen who take so much of the lime-light and everything else they can lay their hands on.

After his death, it was prophesied that the Social Credit movement would die a natural death, and the prophets must be woefully disappointed now after four years to find it stronger than ever and spreading over a much larger territory.

These would-be prophets failed to realize that neither William Aberhart nor Major Douglas originated Social Credit. Its principles were in existence long before the pyramids were built, and nothing can destroy them because they are based on truth and logic.

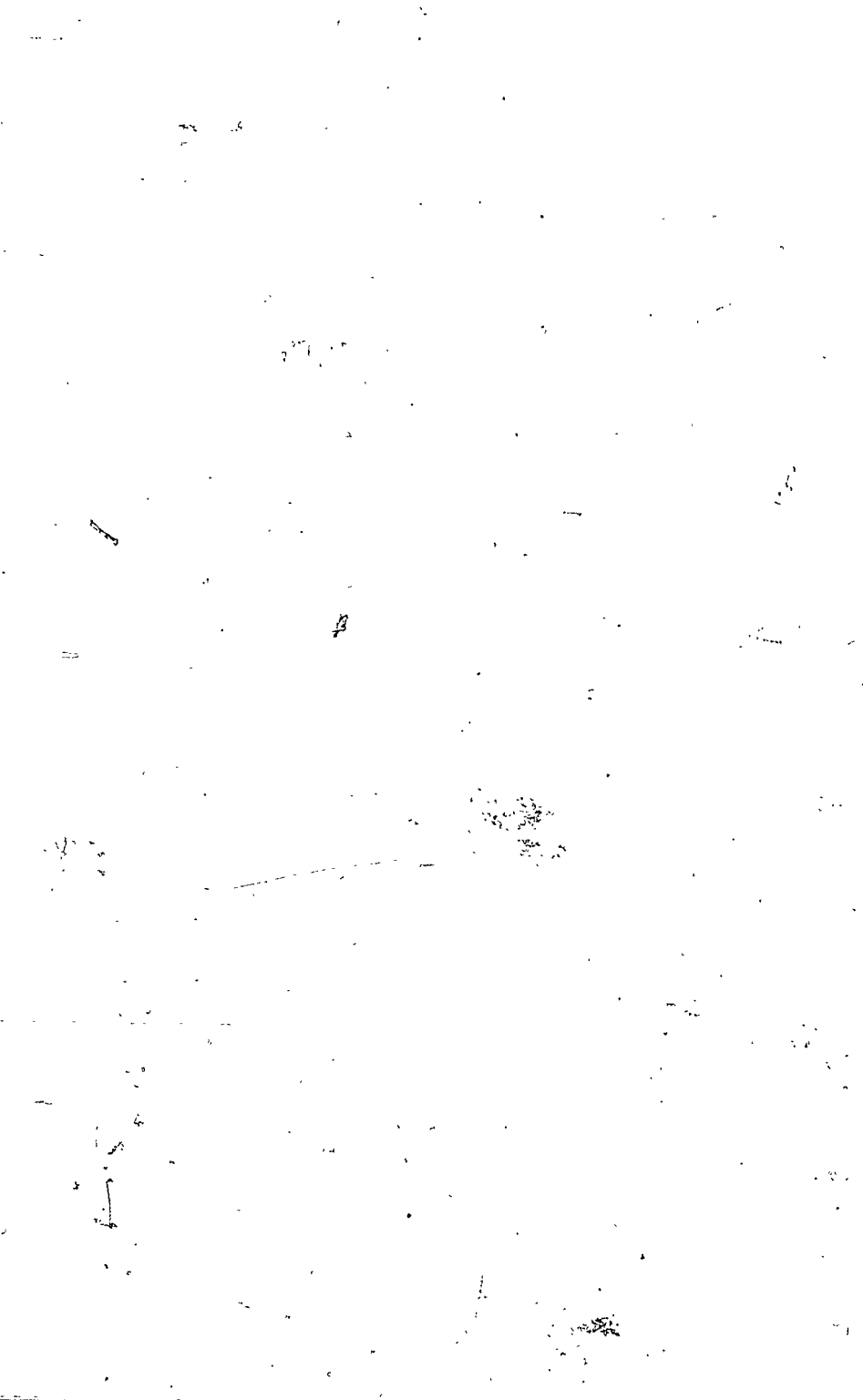
And so I come to the end of this last spasm and this autobiography. It has been fun living it and fun writing it. Many of the episodes have been trivial, but after all, most of life is made up of apparent trivialities, isn't it, and an accumulation of trivialities often make for a rich and full life as long as you like the people with whom you mix.

Our life has been rich with the things that count. I started as a nobody and I'm not ashamed to end it that way.

If on my journey, or in this writing, I have been able to lighten a few burdens or bring a smile to a few tired faces, I am content.

If I lived it all over again, I might avoid some blunders, and possibly fall into worse ones, so I quit with no regrets and no whining. It's been good to be alive all the way through.

— The End —



EPILOGUE

An epilogue, from what I gather from some dictionaries I have consulted, is either a recapitulation, a conclusion or a retrospect.

This particular epilogue isn't really going to be either of these things.

It isn't a recapitulation because I'm not going to weary the reader by again going over the ground already covered. It isn't a conclusion because, as far as the book is concerned, I concluded it in the last spasm, and as for the conclusion of my life,—that is not yet—I hope. As for its being a retrospect, what's the use of retrospecting anyway? The past is past. It has had its effect on the present and future, but you can't change it, and its effect is here to stay, and there's nothing we can do about it. Let the dead past bury its dead. You and I are not dead. It's our present and future that are all that matter.

Of course, I could go on indefinitely filling in details that I missed out, but they would not only tire the reader, which might not matter so much, but they would tire me, too, which would matter a lot. I distinctly don't like being tired.

No, this epilogue is going to be different. I'm not going to recapitulate, and I'm not (distinctly not) finished, so it's not a conclusion, and I'm not going to waste time retrospect-ing.

This epilogue will possibly be "wishful thinking", or a

misty-eyed dream of what the future holds in store for me. It will be only guess work, but there is nothing to stop me from making nice pleasant guesses is there?

A lot of people when they get to my age spend many pleasant, but rather futile hours, looking back on the past. I haven't the faintest idea of living in the past just yet. I'm too busy with the present, and I've still got my eye on the future. Whether it's an abbreviated future or not is of no consequence. What there is of it is mine, and I'm going to enjoy it.

How old am I? I don't really know. I know the date I was born all right, and I know the number of years I have lived, but I still don't know how old I am,—and what is more, I don't care.

I have been told several times that I have never really grown up, and I'm rather proud of it, and years don't seem to make much difference. I have met quite a few serious minded people who were nonagenarians when they were in the forties, and others who were young at eighty, so mathematics don't really enter into it.

All I know is that I'm going on, and while I exist I shall live.

I may have lots more to record in the years to come, but it will be different, because my life will be different.

From now on I shall not be mixed up in politics. I intend to get fumigated at the earliest possible moment, after which I shall take a spiritual turkish bath, and start to live again.

But I shall hold a watching brief on events as they occur and shall be waiting for the good of the world to rise up and challenge the evil.

I shall be looking for a new generation of clear-eyed

youth to carry on the fight where we are leaving off. I shall be helping, I hope, but not too obtrusively. I'm still going to get lots of fun out of life. That will be my reward for being just a nobody trying to play the game. What could be a better reward than that? I think in the past I have somehow got more out of living than most people, and I don't intend to stop now. Enjoying life (in spite of planners and politicians) has become such a favourite occupation that, even at this late hour, I can't break the habit.

Will I work? You ought to know me better than that by now. THAT is one thing I shall NOT do.

The very thought of "full employment" makes me shudder. I intend to rest, and rest and rest.

Of course, I expect to do some writing when I like and on subjects I like, so you are not altogether rid of me, I hope. I am not that easy to get rid of. A lot of people have tried that, but nobody has yet succeeded, so maybe you won't either.

Possibly I am one of those things sent to try you.

Meanwhile: Go with God.